

INTRODUCTION

The overarching aim of this thesis is the articulation of a philosophical notion of an “ethics of thinking,” a kind of thinking that is receptive to the non-identical character of the world of human and non-human objects. The task of explicating an ethical way of thinking requires the gesture of stepping out of the common conception of ethics inasmuch as I would like to construe the ethical life as not necessarily constituting a moral system, but something that has real ethical efficacy despite the absence of a transcendental moral system. In this sense, to think about ethics, as “philosophical praxis,” is to think *outside* ethics, as a system of moral code. The political philosopher Raymond Geuss distinguishes two senses of the word ethics. First is the more common usage as a set of “rules that contain restrictions on the ways in which it is permissible to act toward other people,” and the second refers to a “whole way of seeing the world and thinking about it.”¹ The second sense has a broader signification, yet one which has less common usage. In attempting to make sense of what I call the “ethics of thinking,” I would like to follow Geuss’ second description of ethics. Philosophical thinking has always been a way of looking at or thinking about the world and the objects within it. It is in this very rough context that I want the idea of ethics to be construed, that is to say, that philosophy is inextricably related to ethical thinking. This obviously entails a reconfiguration of the practice of

¹ Raymond Geuss, *Outside Ethics* (Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 2005), 6.

philosophical thinking. The ethics of thinking is critical of the reifying and rigidifying tendency of the human conceptual apparatus, a tendency of human rationality to dominate, control, and instrumentalize the world of human and non-human objects. Thinking is ethical if it seeks to circumvent conceptual reification via a reorientation to the deeply mimetic and emphatically somatic character of human experience. Moreover, thinking is ethical if its concepts are able to maintain their mimetic distance from their objects, thereby opening up each encounter with objects to new possibilities, as opposed to the rigid subsumption of objects under formalized and fixated categories. In order to conceptualize such notion of ethical thinking, I turn to the works of two important German thinkers, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) and Theodor W. Adorno (1903-1969). The thesis, however, will not present a conventional comparative study of the two philosophers. I would rather figuratively call my approach an *experimentation with* Nietzsche and Adorno—an experimental account of the ethics of thinking, which is to be done by emphasizing and activating the strong theoretical links between the two philosophers: 1) language, 2) critique, and 3) the non-identical.

The Nietzsche-Adorno relation might appear to be an odd combination to many, especially to those who are predisposed to read Adorno's works in terms of Hegelian-Marxism. The influence of Hegelian-Marxism on Adorno's thought is indeed proverbial. The strong socio-political dimension of his writings—for instance, his critique of reification,

disdain towards the culture industry, and poignant descriptions of human suffering in a damaged life—is testament to his indebtedness to Hegelian-Marxism, particularly to the ideas of Georg Lukács.² The socio-political or materialist dimension of Adorno's thought has been proven to be a stronghold against idealist philosophy. But there is another angle to Adorno's oeuvre which is noticeably in contrast to its Hegelian-Marxist heritage; yet it is a tension that is not necessarily inimical to Hegelian-Marxism. This tension in Adorno's thinking is partly the reason why he resists, even without really trying, any form of convenient categorization. Beyond Hegelian-Marxism, the insights of Walter Benjamin were profoundly influential for Adorno. It was in the former's *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* that Adorno would discover the critical and interpretative power of conceptual constellations; it is also through this where we find an indirect link to Nietzsche. Adorno writes in his "A Portrait of Walter Benjamin": "The later Nietzsche's critical insight that truth is not identical with a timeless *universal*, but rather that it is solely the historical which yields the figure of the absolute . . . became the canon of his practice" (P 231). I consider this statement from Adorno to be the fulcrum upon which we could

² For a comprehensive discussion of Lukács' influence on Adorno, see Martin Jay, "Theodor W. Adorno and the Collapse of the Lukácsian Concept of Totality," in *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984), 241-275. On Adorno's relation to Hegelian-Marxism, see Nigel Gibson, "Rethinking an Old Saw: Dialectical Negativity, Utopia, and *Negative Dialectic* in Adorno's Hegelian Marxism," in *Adorno: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2002), 257-291.

make sense of his relation to Nietzsche; we could say that, in a broad sense, they share this emphatic view of the “historical”—which they restate as “mimetic” or “somatic”—basis of truth or that what we understand as “totality” is not an ethereal transcendent, but, rather, a reflection of individual moments, the particularity of our sensuous experiences. Here, epistemology and ethics converge, as Nietzsche and Adorno converge. Adorno sees in Nietzsche’s critical outlook on universal truth an image of an ethics of thinking. In a lecture Adorno gave in 1963 where he confessed the truth about his reception of Nietzsche, namely that “of all the so-called great philosophers” he owes Nietzsche “by far the greatest debt – more even than to Hegel” (*PMP* 172)—could it be that Adorno was referring exactly to the emphatic notion of an ethics of thinking? It is not at all farfetched to say, yes and more besides. This image of Nietzsche as a forerunner of critical theory is not something that orthodox Marxists would readily welcome. According to Peter Pütz, after 1945, Nietzsche’s

. . . fragmentary work seemed unsuited for clearing the rubble He was judged guilty through the actions of those who had appropriated him. The harshest condemnation of Nietzsche has come from the orthodox Marxists’ tribunal: they regard him as nothing less than the pre-fascist assassin of reason. Even Lukács has been unable to provide a better judgment.³

³ Peter Pütz, “Nietzsche and Critical Theory,” in *Telos*, 50 (1981-82), 103.

However, Pütz is quick to add that the evaluation of Nietzsche of the immediate members of the Frankfurt School was significantly different and affirmative.⁴ This can indeed be corroborated by Rolf Wiggershaus who relates to us an occasion in 1942 in Los Angeles where the self-exiled members of the Frankfurt School (among them were Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Friedrich Pollock, Herbert Marcuse, Ludwig Marcuse, Günther Anders, and Rolf Nürnberg) debated Nietzsche's significance in social critique, in particular to a Nietzschean account of the relation between need and culture. Wiggershaus points out that it was Adorno (who was supported by Horkheimer) who dominated the intellectual exchange and who sought "to correct or supplement Marx through the use of Nietzsche as a thinker concerned with the 'totality of happiness (*Glück*) incarnate.'"⁵

⁴ *Ibid.* William Outhwaite extends Pütz's observations by discussing, in more detail than Pütz, the resemblances between the works of Benjamin, Horkheimer, and Habermas, on the one hand, and Nietzsche, on the other. See "Nietzsche and Critical Theory," in *Nietzsche: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), 203-221. Other essays discussing the relation to Nietzsche to critical theory are the following: Vincent P. Pecora, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, Critical Theory," in *New German Critique*, 53 (1991), 104-130 and Yianna Liastos, "An Artist's Choice, an Artist's Commitment: Reconciling Myth and Modern History in Nietzsche and Adorno," in *Dialectical Anthropology*, 26 (2001), 137-158. Pecora is skeptical of Nietzsche's contribution to critical theory, while Liastos attempts at a synthesis between Nietzsche and Adorno. Meanwhile, there are only a couple of book length studies dealing specifically with the Nietzsche-Adorno relation worth mentioning here: Karin Bauer, *Adorno's Nietzschean Narratives: Critiques of Ideology, Readings of Wagner* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999) and Rüdiger Sünner, *Ästhetische Szientismuskritik: Zum Verhältnis von Kunst und Wissenschaft bei Nietzsche und Adorno* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1986). Bauer's book has significantly contributed to the initial conception of this thesis.

⁵ Rolf Wiggershaus, "The Frankfurt School's Nietzschean Moment," trans. by Gerd Appelhaus, in *Constellations*, 8:1 (2001), 144.

Allow me to cite here Wiggershaus' recount of Adorno's thoughts on Nietzsche:

Adorno says expressly that he does not want to adopt as positive correctives Nietzschean concepts like "love" and "longing." Indeed, he and Horkheimer valued Nietzsche above all for his frankness concerning the instinctual nature of cruelty, for his attentiveness to the stirring of repressed instincts without minimizing rationalization. No philosopher had brought such anti-Christian, antihumanistic furor to his age as the pastor's son Nietzsche, who interacted almost exclusively with the educated, patricians, and petty nobility. Almost no philosopher had attempted so resolutely, without regard for socio-historical trends, to negate and destroy his own origins and training. Almost no philosopher so uncompromisingly and aggressively placed self-unfolding and enhanced life above considerations of personal gain and social success.⁶

Nietzsche's influence on Adorno's thought is perhaps the most subtle of all that inform the latter's complex and difficult work. Nietzsche's influence is also the least explored. Adorno's relation to Nietzsche is itself complex, often drawing inspiration not from any specific Nietzschean idea, but, rather, broadly from the latter's critical spirit. There are, however, episodic moments, such as the ones mentioned above, when Adorno demonstrates his full support of Nietzsche, however, not without a full awareness and expression of the possible extreme consequences of the latter's doctrines. For example, in a telling passage from *Minima Moralia*, the most Nietzschean in form among Adorno's books, we read:

⁶ *Ibid.*, 145.

Among the motifs of cultural criticism one of the most long-established and central is that of the lie: that culture creates the illusion of a society worthy of man which does not exist; that it conceals the material conditions upon which all human works lies, and that, comforting and lulling, it serves to keep alive the bad economic determination of existence. This is a notion of culture as ideology, which appears at first sight common to both the bourgeois doctrine of violence and its adversary, both to Nietzsche and to Marx. But precisely this notion, like all expostulation about lies, has a suspicious tendency to become ideology itself (MM 22).

Instead of dismissing Nietzsche, however, I see Adorno reinventing the image of Nietzsche, in particular, re-appropriating his role in a critique of culture and society. Together with Horkheimer, Adorno sought to consciously and vigilantly rescue Nietzsche from “fascists and racist appropriations”⁷ and to reinterpret Nietzsche, rather, from the viewpoint of historical materialism, as Wiggershaus points out.⁸ Another passage from *Minima Moralia* exemplifies one of Adorno’s episodic Nietzschean moments:

⁷ Horkheimer writes in his essay “Egoism and Freedom Movements”: “One has interpreted the superman, the most problematic concept left by the psychologist to the analytical realm he commanded, in terms of the petty bourgeois’s pipe dream and confused it with Nietzsche himself.” *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, quoted by Wiggershaus in *ibid.*, 145.

⁸ Interestingly, even before the inception of the Frankfurt School, the early reception of Nietzsche’s works, especially in the United States and in Germany, has been by socialists, anarchists, and feminists—people who can be seen as inclined towards a Leftist reading of Nietzsche. This is quite remarkable according to Robert C. Hulob because, ironically enough, there are many passages in Nietzsche’s oeuvre which suggest that the spirit of his writings is in opposition to precisely socialist, anarchist, and feminist tendencies. “Nietzsche: Socialist, Anarchist, Feminist,” in http://learning.berkeley.edu/robertholub/research/essays/American_Nietzsche.pdf. In his outstanding and very informative study, *Left-Wing Nietzscheans*, Seth Taylor argues that prior to the Second World War Nietzsche was embraced by the antipolitical tradition in Wilhelminian Germany, a tradition which was opposed to militarism and conservative revolution. Moreover, Taylor writes, “German Expressionism (1910-1920) represents the climax of this tradition; its significance lies in the fact that young artists of this movement

The amoralist may now at last permit himself to be as kind, gentle, unegoistic and open-hearted as Nietzsche already was then. As a guarantee of his undiminished resistance, he is still as alone in this as in the days when he turned the mask of evil upon the normal world, to teach the norm to fear its own perversity (*MM* 60).

Adorno's interest in Nietzsche is marked by their shared critical stance towards the whole philosophical enterprise. As mentioned above, he sees in Nietzsche an emphatic receptivity to the historical present as the locale of human experience; as such they both share the utopian imagination of the recovery of experience against the backdrop of reason's tendency to repress our receptivity to the objects of experience, viewed as the perversion of our conceptual apparatus. They both present similar versions of the pathogenesis of this perversion; and with the notions of "nihilism" and "reification" as thought images, they fuel their prognosis with a relentless condemnation of thought's insensitivity, rendering itself incapacitated by its own obsession with order/universalism/purism—a tendency which translates, in the current form of society, as the institutionalization or standardization of reified normative practices, the necrosis and mummification of the vitality of human relations, and, in the most extreme form, the violent oppression of human and non-human others. It is in this

saw in Nietzsche's antipolitical philosophy the material to combat the militarism, authoritarianism, and illiberalism of German society which Nietzsche is usually credited with engendering." (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1990), 3.

very fundamental sense that Nietzsche and Adorno construe thinking as ethical.

In order to paint a picture of an ethics of thinking via the Nietzsche-Adorno relation, the thesis is schematically divided into the three strong links mentioned above: language, critique, and the non-identical. In Part One, I first revisit the profound influence of the early German Romantics on the basic philosophical temperament in Nietzsche- and Adorno's thinking. In particular, I highlight the German Romantics' anti-foundationalist stance and their keen sensibility to the role of language in philosophy; I consider these as the fundamental and potent motivations that we can locate in the writings of both Nietzsche and Adorno. This prefigures a more elaborate discussion of their individual engagement with language and how both philosophers criticize and redeem philosophical language from metaphysics (Nietzsche) and identity thinking (Adorno). Nietzsche's and Adorno's redemptive reading of the language of philosophy converge in their emphasis on the role of "style" in the activity of philosophy, that is, style as philosophical praxis. I consider Nietzsche's reinscription of "metaphorical language" and Adorno's stress on "configurative language" as examples of what Nikolas Kompridis refers to as "receptivity to the new."

Part Two is an attempt to locate the place of the Nietzsche-Adorno tandem in contemporary critical theory and to argue that their style of critique could be considered instances of "disclosing critique," a notion I

borrow from Axel Honneth and Kompridis. I begin by recounting Max Horkheimer's basic assumptions in "Traditional and Critical Theory" as ground for discussing the main critical and emancipatory thrust of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: mimesis as conceptual resistance. I move on to respond to the criticisms leveled against Adorno by Jürgen Habermas in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, arguing that Habermas totally misses the redemptive and emancipatory potential of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. I then argue that it is possible to rehabilitate the notion of mimesis via the notion of disclosing critique: the re-description of social pathologies (Honneth) which requires our receptivity to the particularity and plurality of our experiences (Kompridis) within a given social matrix.

By locating Nietzsche and Adorno within the context of disclosing critique, I argue in Part Three, that *On the Genealogy of Morals* and the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* could be recast within the context of a convincing immanent critique of society. I also highlight Honneth's recent claim that the survival of critical theory partly rests on a revisionist take on the role of Nietzschean genealogy, in particular, the genealogical method's receptivity to the shifts in the social meaning of our normative practices. I use Honneth's position as a counterclaim against Habermas' dismissal of the critical and redemptive potential of the genealogical method. I also discuss the profound ethical thrust and utopian vision of Adorno's negative dialectics and argue that, against the conventional Habermasian position,

negative dialectics is exemplary of what I refer to as the ethics of thinking—a reconciliatory thinking that takes as its point of departure a critical stance against the rigidifying tendency of metaphysical or conceptual thought, owing to its receptivity to the basic reificatory and disclosive-emancipatory tendencies of language. Finally, in the last chapter, I articulate more explicitly the nature of the “ethics of thinking.” It is in this juncture where the Nietzsche-Adorno relation comes into full force. I will demonstrate that the ethics of thinking is linked to aesthetic experience inasmuch as the redemptive dimension of mimesis is only gleaned from an emphatic immersion into damaged life. The experience of damaged life brings to the fore the moments of critical disclosure, possibility and creativity, and redemption.

By focusing on the three aspects of the Nietzsche-Adorno relation, I am able to conduct an *experiment with* these thinkers which permits me to explicitly articulate the nature of the ethics of thinking. I construe ethics in a broad manner, that is, a whole way of seeing the world and thinking about it. I highlight the inextricable relation between thinking (philosophical thinking in particular) and the ethical way we think about the human and non-human objects of the world. I argue that Nietzsche- and Adorno’s stress on the somatic or material origin of thinking allows us to recast thinking as characteristically aesthetic; and by reviving thinking’s sensibility or receptivity to its somatic origin, it is able to see the object of the world in a

new, ethical light. Thinking is ethical if it is able to reconcile with the non-identical objects of the world, while at the same time maintaining mimetic distance; it is only through this that thinking overcomes reification and, thus, opens itself and the world to new possibilities.

PART ONE

ON PHILOSOPHICAL PRAXIS AND LANGUAGE

Chapter One: The Prospects of Philosophical Romanticism

This chapter has a tripartite purpose which will form the initial framework of the present study. As a first step, I will outline the shared intellectual lineage of Nietzsche and Adorno by revisiting the profound influence of the early German Romantics on their basic philosophical orientations.¹ My aim is to synoptically discuss the very basic tenets of early German Romanticism and their relation to the thoughts of Nietzsche and Adorno in order to argue that the strongest and most philosophically constructive aspects of Nietzsche's and Adorno's writings are inspired by, and even resemble, those of the early German Romantics. In particular, I stress the link between early German Romanticism, on the one hand, and Nietzsche and Adorno, on the other, with regard to their preoccupation with the role of language in knowledge formation or in the conceptualizations of our worldviews. I argue that Nietzsche- and Adorno's sophisticated understanding of the nature of language, which is already present in the writings of the early German Romantics but curtailed by the rise of scientific and positivistic philosophies, provides us with an insight into their shared

¹ While I acknowledge here that the Romantic spirit as such is not exclusive to the Germans, owing to the fact that variants of it emerged in France and England and that significant cross-pollinations exist, I will use "early German Romanticism," "Romanticism," and "Romantic spirit" interchangeably in this chapter.

anti-foundationalist stance and their emphasis on the rhetorical and mimetic structure of language and, thus, of knowledge formation. Out of necessity, my recount of the basic tenets of the early German Romantics will be synoptic; I do this by drawing on insights from recent scholars who have specifically presented their reflections on the relation between Romanticism and philosophy such as Andrew Bowie, Judith Norman, Claud Sutton, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre, and Richard Eldridge.² The second step taken in this chapter is a recasting of the Nietzsche-Adorno relation within the context of what Nikolas Kompridis refers to as “philosophical romanticism”; a contemporary strain of philosophy which reclaims and revises the most critically potent and persuasive claims of early German Romanticism that, for Kompridis, are able to properly address the challenges that philosophy and critical theory face today. For Kompridis, the new imperative for philosophy, in particular for critical theory, is its receptivity to the normative challenge of the “new,” that is to say its ability to reconfigure its language in face of the unfamiliar. Recasting the Nietzsche-Adorno within the context of philosophical

² Andrew Bowie, *From Romanticism to Critical Theory* (London: Routledge, 1997); Judith Norman, “Nietzsche and Early Romanticism,” in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 63:3 (2002); Claud Sutton, *The German Tradition in Philosophy* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1974); Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, trans. by Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (New York: State University of New York Press, Albany, 1988); Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, trans. by Catherine Porter (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); and Richard Eldridge, *The Persistence of Romanticism: Essays in Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

romanticism would, therefore, permit us to construe their philosophical enterprise as precisely responding to the normative challenge of the new. By contextualizing the Nietzsche-Adorno relation within the Romantic spirit, we are able to account for the practical aspect of Nietzsche-Adorno enterprise, the aspect which brings this study closer to a revision of critical theory's reception of Nietzsche. This is done in the third section of this chapter, where I attempt to formulate a notion of "philosophical praxis." I argue that by highlighting Nietzsche- and Adorno's receptivity to the aporetic nature of language, we are able to gain an insight into how the "performative" aspect of philosophical writing, which is often curtailed by conventional discursive argumentation, is able to manifest itself as praxis; it is praxis in the sense that it is able to subvert the tendency of philosophy towards conceptual hypostatization, thereby opening up philosophy to new or other possibilities. I consider this last point as a proviso to the main theme of this study: "the ethics of thinking."

A. Inheriting the Romantic Spirit

The basic stance of the likes of Hölderlin, Schelling, the Schlegels, Novalis (who in their own ways responded to Fichte's reading of Kant's *Third Critique*), Hamann, Herder, and Humboldt (who were very critical of Kant's notion of "pure reason" because of its self-defeating neglect of the role of language) is also a fundamental motivation that we can locate in the writings of both Nietzsche and Adorno—a link between the two that could

very well prefigure the motif of the present study. I argue that if a further development of an “ethics of thinking” based on the writings of Nietzsche and Adorno is to be made, then it should begin with an inquiry into the role played by early German Romanticism in the development of their thoughts—particularly, the early German Romantic’s special attention given to the role of language in our knowledge formation, hence, to philosophy. Inasmuch as this move is seen to be setting the ground upon which a proper appraisal of the relation between Nietzsche and Adorno is to be made, it is crucial to ask the question about the Romantic tendency or temperament which runs through and animates their works. We reinforce this with a contemporary appropriation of the Romantic disposition in what Kompridis calls “philosophical romanticism,” a name which, as I shall explain below, would encapsulate the spirit of the Nietzsche-Adorno partnership; it is, moreover, a name which has consequences in store for critical theory.

Andrew Bowie observes that Adorno’s philosophy, especially his aesthetics, is “the most radical attempt to salvage, rather than abandon, the Romantic heritage.”³ The concept of the “work of art” is seen to be threatened by developments in modern rationalism, and Adorno’s aim is partly to revive the Romantic question of the role that art plays in modern

³ Bowie, *From Romanticism to Critical Theory*, 238.

times.⁴ Reification via commodification, which to Adorno is the *Zeitgeist* of our time, presses Adorno to question, and later on retrieve, the redemptive potential of the artwork. Moreover, the anti-foundationalist tendency of the Romantics, according to Bowie, profoundly informs the core of Adorno's mature philosophy.⁵ Like the Romantics, "Adorno is concerned . . . with those areas of modern thought that do not think philosophy can provide a final ground for truth, at the same time as he . . . refuses to take an irrationalist path."⁶ Meanwhile, Judith Norman asserts that, "Nietzsche is frequently and positively compared to Jena Romanticism," a group of intellectuals, as Norman describes, who did not over-valorize emotion over reason.⁷ Norman further notes that both Nietzsche and the Romantics were skeptical of the "validity of traditional philosophy and traditional notions of truth" and examined the prospect of literary methods as alternative ways of framing reality⁸ (a heftier discussion of the basic tenets of early German Romanticism is provided below). Another crucial affinity between the

⁴ It is also worthwhile to mention that the revival of the Romantic impulse is also present in materialist philosophy (via Hegel, Marx, Weber, and Lukács) of which Adorno is very much indebted.

⁵ See Bowie, *From Romanticism to Critical Theory*, 249.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 250.

⁷ Judith Norman names the Schlegel brothers, Novalis, Tieck, Schleiermacher, and Schelling to be the principal figures of Jena Romanticism. See her "Nietzsche and Early Romanticism," 501-502. Moreover, Claud Sutton notes that the development of German Romanticism was strikingly different from that of French Romanticism. In spite of the fact that "Kant was greatly influenced by Rousseau's conception of freedom, and freedom was a watchword of the pre-Romantic 'storm and stress' school of writers in Germany," Sutton remarks that, "to set sentiment and instinct above reason is about the last thing that would have occurred to Kant." *The German Tradition in Philosophy*, 45.

⁸ Norman, "Nietzsche and Early Romanticism," 503.

Romantics, on the one hand, and Nietzsche and Adorno, on the other hand, is their preoccupation with the problematic nature of language and its relation to philosophy. It is clear that the critique of the rationalistic and foundational language employed by traditional philosophy and science is a central theme in both Nietzsche and Adorno. Ultimately, revisiting the relation of Nietzsche and Adorno to the Romantic spirit would show us how this tradition has profoundly shaped their basic conception of philosophical thinking. Initially framing the subsequent discussion through this lens will help us make sense of the central theme of my project, that is, the “ethics of thinking.”

Perhaps it is useful to stipulate what I understand here as the basic tenets of early German Romanticism and determine whether Nietzsche and Adorno are indeed fitting heirs. For, after all, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy emphatically declare that Nietzsche contributed to “prolonging romanticism,”⁹ and I believe that the same could be said of Adorno. Early German Romanticism is commonly viewed as a movement that emerged in Europe in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, most notably from the writings of Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling who, in their philosophical systems, appropriated the poetic sensibilities of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller, August Wilhelm Schlegel, and Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Schlegel

⁹ Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, 2.

among others. The early German Romantics generally emphasized the primacy of nature, individuality through human emotion, literary imagination, a radical detachment from classical ways of thinking, the attempt to unify art with the physical sciences while being critical of the over-rationalization of the study of nature, and a critical attitude towards social conventionalism. This tradition is, however, also characterized by intense contradictions; and some commentators, such as Löwy-Sayre and Lacoue-Labarthe-Nancy, argue that such dissonances between the basic tenets and the authors's particular views form part of what Romanticism is. Romanticism is apparently "an undecipherable enigma," according to Löwy and Sayre,¹⁰

. . . because of its fabulously contradictory character, its nature as *coincidentia oppositorum*: simultaneously (or alternately) revolutionary and counterrevolutionary, individualistic and communitarian, cosmopolitan and nationalistic, realist and fantastic, retrograde and utopian, rebellious and melancholic, democratic and aristocratic, activist and contemplative, republican and monarchist, red and white, mystical and sensual.¹¹

While Löwy and Sayre acknowledge that the ambiguous use of the term "Romanticism" is itself problematic, they do not endorse a simple purification of the term.¹² For Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy it is in the

¹⁰ Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, 1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² See *ibid.*, 1-2. We find a similar concern in Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, who even argue for the inadequacy of the term: "As it is usually understood—or not understood—this name is quite inaccurate, both in what it evokes as an aesthetic category (which often amounts to an evocation of evocation, so to speak, to an evocation of flowing sentimentality

“equivocity” bequeathed to the term that the problem lies.¹³ While acknowledging the importance of the use of the term, and its relation to the contradictory tendencies of the Romantic movement, it is not the intention of this chapter to discuss this in detail. For my purposes, it is sufficient to mention the problematic status of the term and to shift our focus to some of the more affirmative and potentially critical tenets of Romanticism. We have to keep in mind that we are locating Nietzsche and Adorno within this tradition, and our main aim of framing a philosophical critique of modernity via an ethics of thinking will be deeply indebted to this contextualization. It is also important to avoid a haphazard or one-sided account of the Romantic spirit, let alone using the term in its over-simplistic vernacular connotation as representing ultra sentimentalism or emotionalism, which is more of the French variant than the German. Moreover, it is easy to prioritize one aspect at the expense of another, for example, between the literary and the political aspects which seem to be mutually exclusive.¹⁴ Historiographers of Romanticism aggravate the situation “by focusing exclusively on its

or foggy nostalgia for the faraway), and in what it pretends to offer as a historical category (in a double opposition to classicism and to realism or naturalism). It is even less appropriate in that the romantics of ‘early romanticism’ never gave themselves this name . . . Finally, this name is false, in a very general manner, in that it attempts to set something apart—a period, a school, a style, or a conception—that would belong first and foremost to a certain *past*.” Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, 1.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 1-3.

¹⁴ Löwy and Sayre outline: “One of the most serious limitations of most literary studies is that they ignore the other dimensions of Romanticism, its political forms in particular. In a perfectly complementary fashion—and following the rigorous logic of academic disciplines—political scientists often have a regrettable tendency to neglect the properly literary aspects of Romanticism.” Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, 5.

conservative, reactionary, and counterrevolutionary aspect while simply ignoring the revolutionary Romantic trends and thinkers.”¹⁵ Our conception of Romanticism should, therefore, be more sensitive to the symbiotic relation between the literary and the revolutionary (or political). I agree with Richard Eldridge that the Romantic spirit becomes more “persistent” in our time, he writes:

It remains with us as a form of scrutiny of our human possibilities, through and after the advents of aestheticism, inwardizing modernism, and wider political awareness, because of its persistence in the open itinerary of thinking about value, embodied in its own resistances to authoritative closure.¹⁶

From the above passage one can surmise that there is something in the Romantic spirit that is universally philosophical, that is, a resistance to “authoritative closure.” This is what is persistent in Romanticism and, ironically, an aspect that our present age neglects. Romanticism is often stigmatized as “a poetry of self-indulgence and evasion”¹⁷ that simply disregards historical and social realities. Around 1795, especially in Germany, the name “Romanticism” has become a byword for the fashionable¹⁸—not at all dissimilar to how the word “postmodernism” nowadays has been used and abused. This unfortunate trend of

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Richard Eldridge, *The Persistence of Romanticism: Essays in Philosophy and Literature*, 11.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁸ Cf. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, 4.

Romanticism's relegation to "pop culture" (as we also witness happening to postmodernism) obfuscates its critical potential. As the original and highly critical intentions of the early Romantics, like the Schlegel brothers, have been obscured by the popularity of "romanesque romanticism," we could see, in our own time, how the more philosophically interesting or critical aspects of the writings of Foucault, Deleuze, and Derrida could easily get lost in the plethora of images manufactured by their so-called followers. In other words, the bastardization of the "new" is its own-most possibility and, at the same time, its nemesis. Philosophy could turn (and it already has) into an industry and, in return, industry becomes a philosophy. In this context, what is at stake is the redemptive feature of postmodernist critique. Arguably, a similar thing happened to German Romanticism and the Romantic spirit in general.

Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, despite claiming that the Romantics had no predecessors, trace the critical potential of the Romantic spirit to Kantian aesthetics: "Kant opens up the possibility of romanticism. . . . it is because an entirely new and unforeseeable relation between aesthetics and philosophy will be articulated in Kant" ¹⁹ Further, Kantian aesthetics articulates a

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 29. In addition to this, Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert notes: "It is important also to keep in mind that the early German Romantics were, in fact, the first generation of Kant readers. Within this first generation of Kant readers, we find, naturally, important challenges to the universal claims of reason and a move towards incorporating history and political issues into philosophy. In German philosophy through Kant, moreover, history and politics were not considered primary areas of concern for the philosopher. Early German Romantic philosophy was groundbreaking, also, in incorporating these concerns into

deliberate movement away from the traditional conception of *intuitus originarius* (original intuition) represented by the divine as *arche* or *telos* or through the Cartesian *res cogitans* or Hume's empirical sensibility; what the *intuitus originarius* implies is a basic normative theoretical standpoint from which philosophical argumentation could be based. The notion of *intuitus originarius*, according to Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, previously ensured the possibility of philosophy, and in Kant this philosophical *given* is questioned and abandoned to some extent, but nevertheless replaced by *Vernunft* (Reason). For Kant, as also in Nietzsche and Adorno, the "I" is reduced to merely a logical necessity or grammatical exigency.²⁰ This weakening of the subject has been regarded as a "crisis in philosophy" and one that prevented Kant from completing his philosophical system. It is from this crisis, however, the crisis of the subject, ultimately the crisis of the *ontology of transcendence*, that the early Romantics would spring forth. Another link between Kant and early German Romanticism is the emergence of "aesthetic theory" in *The Critique of Judgment*, where Kant attempts to bridge the divide between "natural necessity" and "subjective autonomy" first dealt with in *The Critique of Pure Reason*.²¹ For Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, Romanticism

philosophy, and in the development of the field we know today as the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*). "Introduction: 'What is Early German Romanticism?'," in *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004), 5.

²⁰ Cf. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, 30.

²¹ Cf. Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1990), 15-ff.

is a kind of response to this philosophical crisis—a path forged *in between* speculative idealism and the poetry of poetry.²² The early Romantics attempted to overcome the Kantian aftermath by adapting a Fichtean conversion of the Kantian moral subject through a conception of the subject as “absolutely free” or as *Selbstbewusstsein*.

Europe of the late 18th century is marked by extensive social, moral, philosophical, political, and economic challenges which to a large extent prefigured the Romantic spirit. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy locate a threefold crisis: 1) “the social and moral crisis of the bourgeoisie,” 2) “the political crisis of the revolution,” and 3) “the Kantian critique.”²³ The French Revolution, which marks the eradication of the feudal system, has undermined the complacent aristocracy wherein sons were no longer guaranteed positions in government and the promise of lavish lifestyles began to diminish. The revolution also entailed the decentralization of power in government, but not for long. The consequences of the Kantian critique, which meant the reevaluation of the aims and limitations of philosophy itself, was to have a profound impact on the development of early German Romanticism, as discussed above. Lacoue-Labarthe and

²² See Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, 32-33.

²³ See *ibid.*, 5.

Nancy note that, “The characters we will see assembling in Jena participated in this triple crisis in the most immediate manner.”²⁴ Moreover,

. . . their project will not be a literary project and will open up not a crisis *in* literature, but a general crisis and critique (social, moral, religious, political: all of these aspects are found in the *Fragments*) for which literature or literary theory will be the privileged locus of expression.²⁵

This shift from the crisis-laden language of classical philosophy to the more poetic language of literature would also prove paradigmatic for both Nietzsche and Adorno. Ultimately, the Romantic spirit inaugurated a remodeling of the form of the work that “sets the work to work in a different mode”²⁶ which is in itself a mode of thought that reflects on the form of writing—it is through the Romantic spirit that the “fragment” became significant as a literary genre, “the sign of its radical modernity.”²⁷ Via the *Athenaeum*, the literary journal of the German Romantics first published in 1798, Friedrich Schlegel, in particular, experimented with the fragments on varying themes (from the banal to profound); the brevity of the adventure with the fragment led to further exploits with other related genres, such as the novel, letter, dialogue, poem, and essay.²⁸ It is impossible to discuss the exigencies of these different genres in detail here, but suffice to say that what these experimentations would amount to was the recovery of forms of

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁸ For an interesting account of the exigencies of the fragment as literary genre, see Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy in *ibid*, especially pages 39-119.

writing that were considered, since Plato banished the poets from the republic, antithetical to the aims of philosophy.²⁹ This also meant the recovery of the kinship between art and philosophy. It is not an exaggeration to say that this is precisely the philosophical and literary outlook that both Nietzsche and Adorno inherited from the German Romantics. Of what use is this Romantic outlook to philosophy today? The next section hopes to answer this question.

B. The Normative Challenge of Philosophical Romanticism

The most useful description of “philosophical romanticism,” for our purposes, comes from Nikolas Kompridis; he refers to philosophical romanticism as a contemporary strain of philosophy which is profoundly influenced by early German Romanticism, which has evolved to be broader and more heterogeneous, “a strain of philosophy that is essentially non-naturalistic and that identifies closely with the arts and the humanities.”³⁰

²⁹ Although there also some notable commentators, such as Frederick Beiser, who stress the profound influence of Platonism on the early German Romantics. Beiser locates this strong Platonic strand in the early German Romantics’ appropriation of the *Frühromantik* tradition. See Frederick C. Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative: The Concept of Early German Romanticism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003), 56-72. It is worthwhile to point out that emphasizing the aesthetic element in the works of the early German Romantics is not necessarily inimical to Beiser’s position, for, albeit he emphatically considers the Romantics as absolute idealists, on account of their deep Platonism and Spinozism, Beiser does point out, in another work, that the Romantics regarded nature as a piece of art, that natural law is compatible with aesthetic sensibility. See Frederick C. Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism, 1781-1801* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002), 374. As such, the Platonic element in early German Romanticism could be understood as a revival of the aesthetic dimension of Plato’s thought.

³⁰ Nikolas Kompridis, “Re-inheriting Romanticism,” in *Philosophical Romanticism*, ed. by Nikolas Kompridis (London: Routledge, 2006), 2. It is important to note that the term “naturalism” has varied connotations especially in philosophy, but Kompridis is largely

Like Elridge, Kompridis is keen about the *persistence* of the Romantic spirit in our time; Kompridis writes:

I want to think of contemporary philosophical romanticism as not simply continuing in various ways and with varying degrees of awareness the philosophical projects of German romanticism and German idealism, but as reaching back to them, reclaiming and renaming a living romanticism for our time, and for a time that will follow our own.³¹

In framing an image of Romanticism that will welcome and prefigure an analysis of the Nietzsche-Adorno relation, I deem it helpful to appropriate Kompridis' survey of the defining concerns of what he calls philosophical romanticism.³² Firstly, philosophical romanticism is a response to the problem of modernity as interpreted by the Enlightenment. Kompridis identifies the modern ideals of autonomy, reason, critique, and expressive subjectivity as central to the problem of Enlightenment and, as such, is being problematized by philosophical romanticism—under what conditions are these ideals possible? This also presupposes the issue of what philosophy *is* under these modern conditions: “. . . the metaphilosophical question of what philosophy is or should be is inseparable from what it

referring to “reductive naturalism” which is the view that all phenomena can be reductively explained through natural causal processes and, hence, that the only justifiable paradigm of knowledge is that defined by the empirical natural sciences. A “non-naturalistic” position is, therefore, at the very least, a critical stance against reductive naturalism or “scientism.” Kompridis obviously takes this position. Naturalism, therefore, is not the same with the Romantic preoccupation with nature. See *ibid.*, 1-2.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

³² Kompridis outlines these ten basic tenets of philosophical romanticism in response to the question “So if it not anything like what it is commonly assumed to be, then what *is* ‘philosophical romanticism’?” See *ibid.*, 3.

means to be modern, from the question of what constitutes philosophy's own modernity."³³ In other words, philosophy should gesture towards an inquiry into its own possibility against the backdrop of modernity. Again, this can very well be associated with the persistence of the Romantic spirit, that is, how the Romantic spirit could inform philosophy as a response to the predicaments of modernity, for as "a protean form of life, open to abrupt, incessant and apparently uncontrollable processes of change, modernity is also a very disorienting form of life."³⁴ This disorienting feature of modernity points to the malleable quality of the concept of "identity" and its philosophical problematization. This becomes a serious issue for philosophy, not simply because identity is itself a philosophical concern, but because it also entails "pressing the question of the form and through which philosophy should express itself," that is, "about the nature, sources and limits of its expressivity, of how it can 'speak' in a voice of its own"³⁵ Since this *self-concern* is only possible through the humanities, that is, of being concerned with the "human," Kompridis argues that philosophy should seriously engage in the possibility and future of the humanities.³⁶ In light of this, Kompridis rightly maintains that a "normative" critique of culture is at the heart of philosophical romanticism. Normative, in this

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁶ Cf. *ibid.*

context, would refer to the fate of philosophy in relation to the culture wherein it is nurtured and cultivated. Later on this normativity will be described as an openness or “receptivity” to the “new” which directs thinking (art, literature, philosophy) and, hence, praxis towards an appraisal and espousal of freedom against the backdrop of human finitude. The notion of “receptivity,” which I also borrow from Kompridis, will be further explained and contextualized in Chapter Six.

The immanence of the critical attitude of philosophy towards itself guards philosophy from finalizing a definite voice. This opens up philosophy to a plurality of voices, thereby the possibility of various discourses. Indeed, philosophy becomes *itinerant*—it originates and is situated in a particular locale, but it has the impulsion to leave that locale and *rhizomatically* (to use a Deleuzian coinage) spreads itself and visits other exotic locales, leaving its trace as it moves along, and eventually, if it is concerned enough with itself, revisits its birth locale. To put it in a less metaphorical way, immanent critique entails the blurring of the distinction between “narrative” and “apodictic” forms of argumentation, that is to say, philosophy becomes more rhetorically sympathetic to a variety of voices: “Transcendental, dialectical, hermeneutic, deconstructive, genealogical, and narrative forms of argument . . . to get us to see things in a different light . .

..”³⁷ An immanent critique inspired by philosophical romanticism is not necessarily opposed to a “communicative” model of language of the Habermasian sort, but, rather, is wary of the tendency of such a model to reduce communication to a formalistic and proceduralist stance, ignoring, instead of addressing, the aporetic character of language use and totally neglecting the disclosive potential of the mimetic model of language. As a result, the Habermasian position creates an unnecessary tension between communicative language, on the one hand, and mimetic language, on the other; totally downplaying the possibility of the “reconciliatory” aspect of mimesis, in particular, the mimetic-disclosive power of aesthetic experience.³⁸ But the expansive horizon that mimetic language opens up is crucial for philosophy. This outlook of “receptivity” opens up the philosophical enterprise to the future by, according to Kompridis, enlarging “the cultural conditions of intelligibility and possibility,”³⁹ as opposed to the rigidity and homogeneity of modern forms of argumentation. Kompridis further argues that the defining feature of philosophical romanticism, in contrast to artistic modernism, is the centrality of normative critique which he associates with the challenging engagement with the “new.”⁴⁰ This

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ These issues will be properly addressed in the course of our discussions, specifically in Chapters Three, then in Parts Two and Three of this thesis.

³⁹ Kompridis, “Re-inheriting Romanticism,” 4.

⁴⁰ See Nikolas Kompridis, “The Idea of a New Beginning: A romantic source of normativity and freedom,” in *Philosophical Romanticism*, ed. by Nikolas Kompridis (London: Routledge, 2006), 33.

normative engagement with the new does not mean, for Kompridis, a flight from the everyday or the actual, but rather a reclaiming of the site of the everyday because it is the locale where the recovery must begin.⁴¹

It was mentioned earlier that the early German Romantics were preoccupied with the precedence of nature in philosophical discourse. Kompridis takes this preoccupation “with the problem of how to recover nature as a source of meaning and orientation”⁴² to be also a defining feature of philosophical romanticism. However, the notion of “meaning” in this context should not be regarded in an essentialist or intentionalist sense (one states that entities owe their existence to universal forms, while the other states that meaning is primarily determined by an autonomous subject), but, rather, in a normative sense, by which I mean a deeper sensibility to the dialectical and intertwining roles of language, history, and society. Both essentialism and intentionalism are reductive in the sense that they reduce human experience to either formalism or a kind of solipsism, both ignoring the materiality of cognition and the metaphorical or mimetic creation of meaning. This leads us to the questions of whether the world is to be understood purely mechanistically or naturalistically and whether a more mimetic, symbiotic, and reflective relationship between us subjects and the objects in the world exists, and, moreover, whether such relationship would

⁴¹ Kompridis, “Re-inheriting Romanticism,” in *ibid.*, 5.

⁴² *Ibid.*

bring us to a more redemptive construal of human experience. Finally, Kompridis emphasizes what he refers to as an overarching concern of philosophical romanticism: “the concern with realizing a form of *freedom* that conditions of modernity make possible and thwart at the same time.”⁴³ This form of freedom is tied to the normative notion of the new and is in constant tension with prevailing social, political, and cultural ideals of the present age; these are institutional relations that inform how we construe our identities as social, political, and cultural agents. This would be philosophy’s normative challenge, a challenge which requires philosophy’s active involvement which is grounded in immanent critique. In the context of Nietzsche and Adorno, this questioning of freedom is recast in the former’s genealogical critique of nihilism in *On the Genealogy of Morals* and the latter’s critique of instrumental reason in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

Against the backdrop of the above discussion, one sees the importance of rethinking or reevaluating what critical theory can offer us today. This is to say that bringing forth a substantive analysis of the Nietzsche-Adorno relation presupposes such reevaluation. To an extent, this is in tune with the normative engagement with the new which can be understood as the *imperative of the new*, an imperative which is immanent within, and imminent for, critical theory. Kompridis quotes a passage from

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 6.

Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil* which illustrates philosophy's relation to the new:⁴⁴

More and more it seems to me that the philosopher, being of necessity a man of tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, has always found himself, and *had* to find himself, in contradiction to his day: his enemy was ever the ideal of today. So far all these extraordinary furtherers of man whom one calls philosophers, though they themselves have rarely felt like friends of wisdom but rather like disagreeable fools and dangerous question marks, have found their task, their hard, unwanted, inescapable task, but eventually also the greatness of their task, in being the bad conscience of their time (*BGE* 212).

The philosopher, for Nietzsche, is someone who anticipates the coming of the future by being the “enemy” of the present, that is to say, being a harbinger of change by constantly questioning the fossilizing tendency of well-accepted thought—“the ideal of today.” This is the normative challenge that every philosopher should take, for the emendation of social, political, and cultural conditions involves being at odds with the common. In a similar vein as the early Romantics’ concern for the Kantian critique of subjectivity, critical theory’s relation to the new becomes a crucial aspect of rethinking its role in our present age amidst the crisis it faces.⁴⁵ Indeed, part of the crisis that engulfs philosophy, and thus critical theory, in our time, as has been outlined above, is its fixation with a singular, and often

⁴⁴ See *CD* 4.

⁴⁵ At the beginning of his book *Critique and Disclosure*, Kompridis remarks, “Once we appreciate the depth of this connection, we will also come to see how complexly enmeshed in the self-understanding of modernity are critique, crisis, and the need to begin anew—how deeply, if I may put it this way, they affect modernity’s experience of itself” (*CD* 3-4).

insular, language that leaves out possibilities while at the same time unconsciously harboring intellectual obscurantism and, indeed, dangerous dogmatism. It is in this context that a rethinking of the language of philosophy is deemed a necessity, for the “language of philosophy,” Adorno remarks, “is materially prefigured” (*TLP* 2).⁴⁶ Change in perspective entails change in the way we talk about things. Later, this will be recast as language’s capacity for “critical disclosure” in relation to our receptivity to “possibility” brought about by the recovery of aesthetic sensibility or experience.

C. Philosophical Praxis: Language and Style as Critique of Philosophy

The Romantic disposition, nevertheless, does not mean a wholesale abandonment of the ruin of the common. In the context of Adorno, this normative engagement with the new, for which philosophy endeavors to strive, is prefigured by a more responsive stance towards the problematic state of philosophical language. To some extent, this entails the re-inheritance and, at the same time, the renewal of the tradition. Nevertheless, such a tradition, for Adorno, should always be viewed from a critical or, more specifically, “dialectically negative” stance. Adorno writes that, “The

⁴⁶ Chapter Three of this thesis will specifically deal with Adorno’s vision of reevaluating the language of philosophy. However, for comprehensive surveys of Adorno’s take on language, with special focus on his early essay “Theses on the Language of the Philosopher,” see Samir Gandesha, “The ‘Aesthetic Dignity of Words’: Adorno’s Philosophy of Language,” in *New German Critique*, 97 (Winter 2006), 137-158 and Michael K. Palamarek, “Adorno’s Dialectics of Language,” in *Adorno and the Need in Thinking* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 41-77.

intended communicability of philosophical language is today to be unveiled in all aspects as fraud" (*TLP* 5). While it is easy to be misled by this hyperbolic statement, Adorno's intention is rather to stir our slumbering outlook on concepts like "objectivity" or "communicability" and to rethink and revise our conceptions of objectivity and communicability within the contexts of reconciliatory cognition and mimetic communicability, respectively. We usually take for granted the "idealist demand for the adequation of language to object and society" and we fail to realize that this "is the exact opposite of reality" (*TLP* 4). Therefore, Adorno invites us, especially us philosophers, to observe the dialectical relation between objects/society and language, but more specifically, he wants us to be keen to the implications of the disclosure of "damaged life." This means that actual reality does not measure up to our conception of a "good life" and that an ethical response to the "wrong state of things" is made possible by our receptive and honest relation to what surround us. The rehabilitation of this receptivity is the new ethical imperative that philosophy, even as an academic discipline, should instigate. This implies that philosophy should always guard herself from slacking off from its "critical" relation towards its own language, more specifically, to philosophy's tendency of hypostatizing its concepts or what Adorno refers to as "reification." This neither entails an abandonment of the philosophical tradition nor doing away with the use of concepts altogether, but rather, Adorno insists, "conventional terminology—

no matter how ruined—is to be preserved, and today the new words of the philosopher are formed solely out of the changed configuration of words . . .” (*TLP* 6). So, even if philosophy is indebted to the tradition and the inevitable repetition of the tradition’s language, there should be a conscious effort from among philosophers to reconfigure the tradition’s concepts, old concepts are renewed and repeated only via reconfiguration. This is the only way that philosophy is able to circumvent the reification of concepts. Moreover, this change in the configuration of words should “stand in history” (*TLP* 6). In other words, the dialectical nature of philosophical discourse is seen in its normative relation to history, that is to say, how philosophical concepts or metaphors assume new forms and meanings alongside the dialectical movement of history, and how they are enmeshed therein. The philosopher’s critical relation to philosophical language welcomes what Adorno calls “configurative language” which he sees as slicing between the “conventional” use of words and “speechless subjective intention” (*TLP* 8). Moreover,

. . . configurative language represents a third way as a dialectically intertwined and explicatively indissoluble unity of concept and thing. The explicative indissolubility of such unity, which eludes comprehensive logical categories, today compellingly requires the radical difficulty of all serious philosophical language (*TLP* 8).

This “indissoluble unity of concept and thing” is recast in a later chapter as our receptivity to the subject-object relation, which, for Adorno,

could only be understood via a revision of the mimetic process of cognition. This mimetic process of cognition or “cognitive utopia” only makes sense if we consider it as a process occurring within language. Hence, it is important to discuss Nietzsche- and Adorno’s theory of language because they provide us initial insights into their epistemologies. Ultimately, their basic or general insights about language inform their more particular reflections about the language of science and philosophy. It could be argued that the philosophical study of the nature of language is fundamental to philosophy’s self-understanding, for accounting for philosophy’s possibilities and limitations largely depends on the philosophers’ receptivity to the dialectical or mimetic (Adorno) or metaphorical (Nietzsche) character of language. For both Nietzsche and Adorno the hypostatization and the refusal or failure to renew concepts mark the end of philosophy, hence, the end of thinking. This being said, one could say that philosophy’s search for a *voice* is something immanently grounded in philosophical discourse itself. Language or the “formation of metaphors,” as Nietzsche puts it (*TL* I, 88), is a fundamental human drive and, thus, fundamental to philosophy. Once philosophy becomes aware and, more importantly, accepts its essential indebtedness to language, then it will be more difficult for philosophy to adhere to and fortify a *purist* notion of argumentation that only the “chosen ones” have access to. For Adorno, as for Nietzsche, not only that a movement from a pure language to configurative language is necessary, but that a reflection on

philosophy's relation to language should be seen as a continuous endeavor for philosophy. Materially speaking, a philosophical construct, Adorno maintains, stands "in a formed relationship of tension with its linguistic structure . . ." (*TLP* 10). Max Horkheimer, for his part, hints that, "Philosophy helps man allay his fears by helping language to fulfill its genuine mimetic function," for "values and ideas are inseparable from the words that express them . . ."⁴⁷ My conception of an "ethics of thinking" is in accord with philosophy's self-reflection or self-understanding, a process which is inaugurated by philosophy's sensitivity to its own language. Further, this sensitivity to language is in accord with what I refer to as "philosophical praxis."

Ultimately, a critique of modernity is only possible via a critique of philosophy itself. And, as Adorno points out quite emphatically: "All philosophical critique is today possible as the critique of language" (*TLP* 9). The purpose of revisiting the early Romantic legacy is to hint on how both Nietzsche and Adorno were brought up within this tradition and how the main thrust of their works is faithful to the basic Romantic spirit: *the rethinking of language and the openness to the new*. These two interwoven tendencies, rethinking of language and openness to the new, inaugurate the possibility of talking about the Nietzsche-Adorno relation. This move permits us to put these thinkers in a context from which we could consider

⁴⁷ Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (London: Continuum, 2004), 121.

their basic and earnest preoccupation with the nature language to inform the way they present or “perform” their philosophical projects. Nietzschean genealogy and ideology critique via negative dialectics are modes of philosophical critique that are most sensitive to the aporetic nature of language and, hence, our cognitive apparatus; but instead of downplaying these features of language and cognition, I argue, that Nietzsche and Adorno locate “possibility” precisely from our “receptive” and “reflective” stance towards the disclosed aporias of language.

But beyond genealogy and ideology critique, as methodological instances in Nietzsche- and Adorno’s works, we find that their shared “performative” engagement with philosophical writing, which shows in their use of aphorisms and unsystematic essays, their conscious advocacy of the importance of “style” as a philosophical-critical-performative stance. In this sense, it is through style, particularly, the blend between the fluid- and torrential character of their writing style, that their insights are able to slip through the small crevices of our otherwise hardened thoughts and, oftentimes, hammer our ossified worldviews. Nietzsche’s and Adorno’s use of aphorisms and essays can be deemed as a methodological counterweight to the existing philosophical order. More specifically, style as mode of critique, Karin Bauer notes, is a “protest against the reduction of thought to logic and systems,” and moreover, functions “positively to affirm

perspectivism, contradiction, multiplicity, and complexity.”⁴⁸ In their use of aphorisms and essays, Nietzsche and Adorno, respectively, evince their own styles of writing that are performative and, at the same time, reflexive. The aphorism and the essay are instances of the performance of *critique*. Performatively employed in philosophical discourse, the aphorism and essay are enacted as self-reflexive critique of philosophy, that is to say, its very own “disclosive-corrective” principle.

Adorno’s *The Essay as Form* was written as a critique of scientific positivism wherein he proposes that “the innermost form of the essay is heresy” (AR 110), that is to say, that the essay is a deliberate, yet profoundly rhetorical, violation of the formal rules of scientific and philosophical discourse. Adorno describes the essay as both “open” and “closed” inasmuch as it “negates anything systematic” and that “it labors emphatically on the form of its presentation” (AR 105). Hence, the reflexivity of the essay, for Adorno, is manifested in its sensitivity to “the non-identity between presentation and presented material forces the form to make unlimited efforts” (AR 105). In this sense, therefore, the essay resembles the artistic gesture, that is, the impulse to create. Akin to the work of art, the

⁴⁸ Karin Bauer, *Adorno’s Nietzschean Narratives: Critiques of Ideology, Readings of Wagner* (State University of New York Press, New York, 1999), 191. Bauer also notes: “By resisting the notions of absolute truth, completeness, and finality in both their manner of writing and argumentation, and by including the reader into their thought processes, Nietzsche and Adorno allow their readers to witness writing as a process of becoming and to appreciate the text as a product that offers no universal, definite, and irrevocable conclusion or insight.” *ibid.*

essay is an attempt to articulate significant human experiences that have been wrought through the speculative activity of the intellect. It does this, however, in a way that defies a definitive account of experiences, by being aware of the role of “form” or “structure” in writing. In other words, the essay does not pretend to present an unequivocal representation of the subject at hand. Far from an outright rejection of concepts, the essay does not deny that it still depends on concepts as linguistic building blocks. Adorno argues that the essay “takes the matter of presentation more seriously than those procedures that separate out method from material and are indifferent to the way they represent their objective contents” (AR 101). The essay gropes for sense and, according to Adorno, it does this only because of its “consciousness of its own fallibility and provisional nature” (AR 104).

Meanwhile, in *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche admonishes: “He who considers more deeply knows that, whatever his acts and judgments may be, he is always wrong” (HH 518). The purpose of Nietzsche’s style of writing is basically to *perturb* his readers. It is with the seemingly unsystematic presentation of his writings that the main character of his criticism of philosophy in general and modern culture in particular comes into full force. Nietzsche’s aphoristic style is a protest against the regimented style of traditional philosophical writing. The seeming lack of coherence in Nietzsche’s style of writing is itself a gesture of subversion

against the established epistemic order, that is to say, a heretical gesture in Adorno's sense. It is, however, important to note that, as a critical stance against the tendency of metaphysics towards conceptual reification, the deliberate aphoristic presentation of Nietzsche's ideas does not necessarily mean that one cannot configure or reconfigure the aphorisms into a coherent whole; but this reconfiguration involves the *active* involvement of the reader, who can tentatively assume the mimetic center of the exegetical process. This is perhaps what Nietzsche means when he writes in *On the Genealogy of Morals*: "An aphorism, properly stamped and molded, has not been 'deciphered' when it has simply been read; rather, one has then to begin its *exegesis*, for which is required the art of exegesis" (*GM* preface, 8).⁴⁹ Doing philosophy, therefore, in this context, will always be open to the new—even Adorno, himself, opines that "the object of the essay is the new as something genuinely new, as something not translatable back into the staleness of already existing forms" (*AR* 108-109).

We can observe that for both Nietzsche and Adorno, philosophical writing, through the aphorism or the essay, has something to do with *education*. For Nietzsche, the aphoristic style is at the same time a pedagogical demonstration of suspicion, while for Adorno, the essay

⁴⁹ In relation to this, Alexander Nehamas observes: "The connection between Nietzsche's stylistic pluralism and his perspectivism is more subtle and oblique. His many styles are part of his effort to present views without presenting them as more than views of his own and are therefore part of his effort to distinguish his practice from what he considers the practice of philosophers so far." *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Harvard University Press, Massachusetts, 1985), 20-21.

becomes a learning experience inasmuch as it is essentially “exposed to error” and pays “for its affinity with open intellectual experience by the lack of security, a lack which the norm of established thought fears like death” (AR 101). It is the “heretical” gesture that the aphorism and essay make that perturbs the established norms of thought. As pedagogical devices, the aphorism and essay gesture towards an emancipatory element in thinking. As such, we could consider Nietzsche and Adorno demonstrating how philosophical writing itself is able to liberate thinking from the regiments of traditional philosophy or the hypostatization of concepts. In this sense, the style or “form” of presentation of philosophical insights, specifically the form of writing, becomes a mode of “philosophical praxis” which launches a critique of the rigidifying tendencies of traditional philosophy. What we can observe Nietzsche and Adorno doing is an attempt to reinstall the redemptive dimension of doing or writing philosophy, more specifically, philosophy’s attunement to the metaphorical or mimetic dimension of writing which is the most sustainable extension of language as a normative basis of thinking.

It is important to note that this sensitivity to the relation between language and philosophy, specifically the idea that language is constitutive of our cognition or formation of the world, far from being an original

realization of either Nietzsche or Adorno, is as old as Plato's *Cratylus*.⁵⁰ However, closer to Nietzsche and Adorno are the works of the proponents of the *Sturm und Drang* movement, like Johann Georg Hamann and Johann Gottfried Herder, and the linguist Wilhelm von Humboldt. According to Cristina Lafont, the Hamann-Herder-Humboldt tradition marked the linguistic turn in German philosophy which is characterized by two main features. First is that Hamann, in particular, began to regard language as constitutive of thought as opposed to the view of language held by the philosophy of consciousness, represented by Kant's transcendental philosophy, as simply a means of expressing pre-linguistic thoughts. Second, and as a result of the first, reason has been "de-transcendentalized" and has been situated in a plurality of natural languages.⁵¹ This, of course, is partly a critique directed towards the Kantian transcendental subject, instigated by a counter-Enlightenment movement of which Hamann is considered to be the progenitor. Hamann's metacritique of Kant is said to have marked the point at which the tradition breaks with the philosophy of consciousness. Nevertheless, as Lafont notes, the impact of Hamann's insights were minimal in his lifetime but would rather prove profoundly significant as an anticipation of the critique of language that would transpire

⁵⁰ See Plato, *Cratylus*, trans. by C.D.C. Reeve, in *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1997), 101-156.

⁵¹ Cristina Lafont, *The Linguistic Turn in Hermeneutic Philosophy*, trans. by Jose Medina (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1999), 3.

a couple of centuries later.⁵² On a broader scale, the specific critique directed towards Kant is representative of a larger critique directed against the instrumentalist view of language that has remained unquestioned since the time of Plato. Against the instrumentalist view, Hamann (as well as writers such as Herder, Humboldt, and arguably the rest of the German romantics) argues that language is more than “a mere instrument for fixing and communicating the experience of the world,” because our experience of the world is determined “by the character of our own language.”⁵³ In other words, our cognitive relation with the world is not a-linguistic, but, rather, is essentially constituted by our normative use of language. Therefore, in opposition to Kant who wanted to secure the autonomy of Reason and thereby separate man from ordinary human speech, Hamann does not distinguish reason from language and emphasized, rather, how reason is

⁵² Hamann’s metacritique came out shortly after the publication of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*. The “Metacritique on the Purism of Reason” offers us, according to James C. O’Flaherty, “a morphology of the history of the rational method in philosophy.” See *Unity and Language: A Study in the Philosophy of Johann Georg Hamann* (New York: AMS Press Inc., 1966), 85. Hamann, O’Flaherty argues, presents a genealogy of how philosophy has been purified from external forces such as the authoritative church, the authoritative book or creed, the authoritative political system, and eventually from individual experience. Cf. *ibid.*, 85-86.

In the “Metacritique,” Hamann speaks of a three step purification of philosophy: “The first purification of reason consisted in the partly misunderstood, partly failed attempt to make reason independent of all tradition and custom and belief in them. The second is even more transcendent and comes nothing less than independence from experience and its everyday induction. . . . The third, highest, and, as it were, empirical purism is therefore concerned with language, the only, first, and last organon and criterion of reason, with no credentials but tradition and usage.” “Metacritique on the Purism of Reason,” in *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, trans. by Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 207-208. Also see Bowie, *From Romanticism to Critical Theory*, 56-61.

⁵³ Lafont, *The Linguistic Turn in Hermeneutic Philosophy*, 7.

normatively constituted by language.⁵⁴ This critique of Kant would prove decisive for subsequent reflections on the relationship between philosophy and language which is obviously related to the overcoming of Kant by the Romantics as outlined above—a critical standpoint that would prove profoundly influential for Nietzsche and Adorno.

The above discussion gives us a hint about the philosophical disposition that Nietzsche and Adorno share. To further examine this shared philosophical attitude, specifically how a more nuanced approach to language is ramified in the works of Nietzsche and Adorno, it is necessary to reconstruct how this ramification occurs in each of these philosophers works, that is to say, their engagement with the role of language in philosophical thinking. A couple of Adornoian insights have been already mentioned hitherto, namely, that the critique of philosophy is only possible as a critique of language and philosophy's rethinking of its own voice involves an active movement from conceptual language to figurative language. It goes without saying that there is a strong kinship between these Adornoian propositions and the Romantic shift from the unbending discourse of traditional philosophy to the more literary form. Throughout the history of Western philosophy, we have indeed witnessed the emergence of a plurality of voices (e.g., the plurality of philosophical schools of thought), but we have also

⁵⁴ For a more detailed account of Hamann's relation to Kant, see O'Flaherty, *Unity and Language*, especially pages 81-94.

witnessed that the rise, and now dominance, of scientific and positivistic forms of philosophy has curtailed the Romantic disposition towards the rhetorical or literary aspect of philosophical thinking. And it is the latter, as Nietzsche and Adorno strongly claim, that can better articulate the complexity of thinking and the formation of knowledge—specifically, aspects of thinking that resist a straightforward discursive conceptualization. Nietzsche- and Adorno's examination of the figurative character of language will be accounted for in the next two chapters, and when taken together they constitute an attempt to reconstruct the Nietzsche-Adorno meta-critique of philosophy and, like Hamann, a recovery of the normative role of language in philosophy. This reconstruction is an attempt to corroborate, but not conflate, Nietzsche's and Adorno's thoughts on language with the aim of illustrating what they think is the affirmative feature of language, as well as underscoring their complaint against conventional philosophical language. It is, therefore, necessary to give each philosopher his own space. Given the reconstruction of a critique of language, it will be possible to talk about a new conception of "praxis" that will lead us to a conceptualization of an ethics of thinking.

Chapter Two: Reinscribing Metaphor: Nietzsche's Theory of Language

In the preceding chapter, it was shown that both Nietzsche and Adorno come from a shared intellectual lineage, early German Romanticism, which profoundly informed their anti-foundationalist disposition. It was also pointed out that, like the early German Romantics, Nietzsche and Adorno both had serious preoccupations with the nature of language and, in particular, the relation between language and philosophical discourse. The openness of philosophy to the "new" largely depends on how philosophy comes to terms with its own language, that is, how it responds to the limitations and uncharted possibilities of its language. Nietzsche and Adorno insist that it is only through the overcoming of metaphysical or identity thinking that could we redeem philosophy from the reificatory tendency of conceptual thinking. Such overcoming, however, requires a more in-depth examination of the dynamics of language use.

In this chapter, I wish to argue that Nietzsche proposes an overcoming of the reification of knowledge by instigating a paradigm shift from "metaphysical thinking" to "metaphorical thinking." More specifically, Nietzsche supposes that it is a shift from a "nihilistic worldview" to what can be called an "aesthetic worldview." The shift is not straightforward and presupposes an examination of the genealogical foundations of metaphysical thinking. As we shall see in the following, Nietzsche's point of departure is the critique of the language of metaphysics—a purely conceptual and

deceptive language that dissimulates the material and mediated origin of thinking; metaphysics conceals the social- and interpretive dimension of language. The recovery of the metaphorical dimension of language, via the displacement of the ideals of metaphysics, allows philosophy to move from a purely conceptual or transcendent discourse to a discourse that highlights the social, historical, and indeterminate, and thus creative, character of thought—what will be described later as the “human” element in knowledge formation.

My discussion will pass through several steps. First, it is necessary to contextualize Nietzsche's study of language, that is, how his preoccupation with language generally prefigures his whole philosophy and how his study of language relates to the intellectual tradition he inherited. Second, Nietzsche's engagement with language circles around his critique of the “truth drive,” hence, a further contextualization is made by presenting a sketch of his critique of metaphysics. As we will see in more detail later, metaphysics and the drive towards truth are inextricably related. The third step is to reconstruct Nietzsche's engagement with language, wherein I will focus on the following: 1) the socio-linguistic basis of the truth drive, 2) the dissimulative tendency of a purely conceptual language, and 3) the reification of the concept. Nietzsche's early writings on rhetoric and language are the main sources of my reconstruction, in particular, his *“Über Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinne”* (“On Truth and Lies in a

Nonmoral Sense”), and his lecture notes *“Darstellung der Antiken Rhetorik”* (“Description of Ancient Rhetoric”). The last section of the chapter will deal with Nietzsche’s proposal to reinscribe metaphor in philosophical discourse: the overcoming of the reification of language which is paradigmatic of a shift from metaphysical thinking to aesthetic thinking.

A. The Study of Language and the Critique of Nihilism

I pointed out in Chapter One that Hamann’s metacritique of reason was an earlier version of a linguistic engagement with the philosophical conception of philosophy: an attack of the Kantian way of universally categorizing reality that transcended the normativity of language. Hamann maintains that the Kantian project is oblivious of the role of language in philosophy; such early “linguistic turn” was not only presented as a metacritique of Reason, but also meant the perception of the importance of “literary language” as a counterculture, so to speak, against representational language, a perception that would eventually become one of the points of departure of German Romanticism. We have enough reason to believe that Hamann has some degree of influence on Nietzsche’s own engagement with language. Thomas H. Brobjer documents that during the year 1873—which is partly the period when Nietzsche was working on essays such as, *“Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben”* (“On the Uses and Disadvantage of History for Life”), “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense,” and his lecture notes “Description of Ancient Rhetoric”—Nietzsche

read a number of works by writers such as Hamann, Lichtenburg, Hartmann, Hegel, Schiller, Emerson, and Hume. In particular, Nietzsche borrowed and read Hamann's *Schriften und Briefe* from which references were made in *Die Philosophie im tragischen Zeitalter der Griechen* (*Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*) and "Description of Ancient Rhetoric."⁵⁵ Despite the fact that he did not share Hamann's Neoplatonic and theological inclinations, as well as an utter disapproval of Hamann's apparently insipid style,⁵⁶ Nietzsche admired the profundity of Hamann's insights on language. However, in spite of this link, it may be too hasty and generous to declare that Hamann was a major influence for Nietzsche. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that, at least, Nietzsche had a firsthand reading of Hamann, which means that Nietzsche was familiar with the debate on the problem of language during that period.⁵⁷ Moreover, the affinity between their engagements with the profound relation between language and philosophy is undeniable. It would be more precise to locate direct influences, in

⁵⁵ See Thomas H. Brobjer, *Nietzsche's Philosophical Context: An Intellectual Biography* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 58, 60. Also see Christian Emden, *Nietzsche on Language, Consciousness, and the Body* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 94. For Nietzsche's references to Hamann, see PTG 37 and TL V, 41.

⁵⁶ Cf. Brobjer, *Nietzsche's Philosophical Context*, 205.

⁵⁷ An attempt to bring the works of Hamann and Nietzsche together is James C. O'Flaherty's *The Quarrel of Reason with Itself: Essays on Hamann, Michaelis, Lessing, Nietzsche* (Columbia: Camden House, 1988).

varying degrees, from Kant, Schopenhauer, Lange, Hartmann, and Gerber with regard to Nietzsche's account of the nature of language.⁵⁸

There are also two related challenges regarding the reconstruction of Nietzsche's engagement with language that need to be acknowledged. First is that among his published writings, starting with *The Birth of Tragedy* in 1872 to *Ecce Homo* in 1888, no explicitly systematic treatment of the theme of language is undertaken.⁵⁹ This makes it easy to miss out on what is truly original in Nietzsche's inquiry into the nature of language. A more or less systematic, or at least extensive and explicit, treatment of language is found in his early unpublished writings that were supposedly composed within the years 1869-1875. His "Description of Ancient Rhetoric," perhaps delivered in 1872-1873, is Nietzsche's most organized and sustained treatment of the history and nature of rhetoric. This was, however, a lecture course in philology that he did not intend for publication. Another important text of this period, and the more widely known, is "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense" which was originally conceived as the first part of a larger project called *Das Philosophenbuch* (*The Philosophers' Book*), which was

⁵⁸ The following are Nietzsche's sources: Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and *Critique of Judgement*, Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*, Lange's *The History of Materialism*, Hartmann's *Philosophy of the Unconscious*, and Gerber's *Die Sprache als Kunst*. Claudia Crawford offers an excellent survey of the influences of these works in *The Beginnings of Nietzsche's Theory of Language* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1988).

⁵⁹ Apart from the more popular books constituting what is regarded as the official canon of his works, Nietzsche, of course, actively published scholarly articles in philology, especially from the years 1867 to 1873.

intended as an apologetic rejoinder to *The Birth of Tragedy* but, nonetheless, never came to completion and was eventually abandoned.⁶⁰ "On Truth and Lies" is, nevertheless, Nietzsche's most straightforward and more original treatment of the nature and role of language. The second challenge is the question whether there is continuity between these early insights on language and Nietzsche's more mature works. Arthur Danto, in his attempt to make Nietzsche more accessible to analytic philosophers, is skeptical about the general form and logical consistency of "On Truth and Lies."⁶¹ Maudemarie Clark, despite her impressive reconstruction of Nietzsche's early denial of truth based on "On Truth and Lies," claims that Nietzsche later abandoned his early linguistic account of truth to take a more or less neo-pragmatic or common-sense idea of truth.⁶² In spite of this general skepticism, there seems to be, at the same time, a consensus among other Nietzsche scholars that Nietzsche's early musings on language and truth should not be taken for granted. As a matter of fact, majority of these

⁶⁰ In his introduction to *Philosophy and Truth*, Daniel Breazeale offers a succinct but very informative history of Nietzsche's *Das Philosophenbuch*, from its original conception to its eventual abandonment. See "Introduction," in *Philosophy and Truth: Selections From Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870's* (New York: Humanities Press International, 1990), xviii-xxiii.

⁶¹ See Arthur Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), 36-47.

⁶² See Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 63-125. For a detailed counter-criticism of Clark's view, see Wayne Klein, *Nietzsche and the Promise of Philosophy* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), 56-61, 88-95. To a lesser degree of skepticism, Alexander Nehamas notes that *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense* "has been immensely overestimated." *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985), note 6, 246.

scholars agree that what gets eventually infused into Nietzsche's published writings, a claim which he never abandoned, is the inextricable relationship between language and knowledge formation.⁶³ I wish to argue that this fundamental understanding of language laid bare in the early writings prefigures Nietzsche's mature conception of the task of philosophy.⁶⁴

In order to show Nietzsche's original contribution to the philosophy of language, it is necessary to revisit his critique of metaphysics or a mode of thinking characterized as "nihilistic" and to elucidate how this "metaphysical bias" prefigures how we use language. Sketching this

⁶³ The following are worth mentioning and the list is by no means exhaustive: J. Daniel Breazeale, "The Word, the World, and Nietzsche," in *The Philosophical Forum*, 6:2-3 (Winter-Spring 1974-75), 301-320; Claudia Crawford, *The Beginnings of Nietzsche's Theory of Language* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1988); Paul de Man, "Rhetoric of Tropes," in *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 103-118; Roger Hazelton, "Nietzsche's Contribution to the Theory of Language," in *The Philosophical Review*, 52:1 (January 1943), 47-60; Klein, *Nietzsche and the Promise of Philosophy*; Sarah Kofman, *Nietzsche and Metaphor*, trans. by Duncan Large (London: The Athlone Press, 1993); Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, "Le detour (Nietzsche et la rhétorique)," in *Poétique*, 5 (1971), translated into English by Gary M. Cole as "The Detour," in *The Subject of Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 14-36; Tracy B. Strong, "The Epistemology of Nihilism," in *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 53-86; Alan D. Shrift, "Language, Metaphor, Rhetoric: Nietzsche's Deconstruction of Epistemology," in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 23:3 (July 1985), 371-395; Sander L. Gilman et al., "Nietzsche's Lectures on Rhetoric: Reading a Rhetoric Rhetorically," introduction to *Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), ix-xxvii; Ken Gemes, "Nietzsche's Critique of Truth," in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 52:1 (March 1992), 47-65; Charles Bingham, "The Goals of Language, the Language of Goals: Nietzsche's Concern with Rhetoric and its Educational Implications," in *Educational Theory*, 48:2 (Spring 1998), 229-240; Douglas Thomas, *Reading Nietzsche Rhetorically* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1999); and Emden, *Nietzsche on Language, Consciousness, and the Body*.

⁶⁴ This is corroborated by Lacoue-Labarthe's claim that, "despite some changes in terminology, Nietzsche's analyses of language will vary little and that he will almost always stick to the knowledge gained in these first years." "The Detour," 15.

framework provides a theoretical space from which we could present a thoroughly Nietzschean diagnosis of the role that language plays in our valuations, may those be metaphysical or otherwise. I say thoroughly Nietzschean owing to the fact that Nietzsche's analysis of the nature of nihilism is unique in the history of Western thought. Hence, we should give special attention to his treatment of the relationship between metaphysical thinking and nihilism. This framework hopes to reveal that Nietzsche's engagement with language is more sophisticated than usually regarded. While it is important to draw a line between Nietzsche and the larger enterprise of the philosophical or theoretical study of language, my aim, however, is not so much to brood on this issue, but to uncover some elements of Nietzsche's engagement with language that will help set the ground for the development of an ethics of thinking. As a matter of fact, it could also be added that the similarities between Nietzsche and recent philosophy of language could only prove the cogency of the former's early claims about language;⁶⁵ but, at the same time, laying this bare could also disclose the radical aspect of the Nietzschean account, which is its the emphasis on the "ethical" implications of our use of language. I wish to

⁶⁵ A good place to start with regard to Nietzsche's relation to Analytic Philosophy—especially on the themes of truth and language—is Babette E. Babich's "On the Analytic-Continental Divide in Philosophy: Nietzsche's Lying Truth, Heidegger's Speaking Language, and Philosophy," in *A House Divided: Comparing Analytic and Continental Philosophy*, ed. by C. G. Prado (New York: Humanity Books, 2003), 63-103.

argue that the Nietzschean concern tends to delve more into the implications of the tension that the nihilistic spirit creates within our linguistic valuations.

Broadly speaking, language could be construed as a way of interacting with the world which involves the eventual creation of conceptual images that function as *conduits* between subjects and world. This does not only entail a conception of the world, but it also includes ways of *inhabiting* and *acting* in the world. By and large, our transaction with the world would, therefore, entail our activities, the way we use worldly objects, and the way we relate to one another intersubjectively. Language, for Nietzsche, reflects our *intimate* and dialectical (even *technical*) relationship with the world. This does not, however, mean that there is a one-to-one correspondence between language, on the one hand, and the world *qua* world, on the other. Hence, for Nietzsche, there is a tension between the conceptual- and figurative approach of looking at the world. However, despite this tension, a caveat should be made that Nietzsche is not proposing a total eradication of our conceptual apparatus. Rather, what he proposes is a revaluation of our conceptual apparatus and to expose it in its hypostasized form and also to disclose its basic metaphorical structure. In this sense, there is no difference between the conceptual (or literal) and figurative inasmuch as their distinction “is entirely relative—a difference in

degree rather than kind.”⁶⁶ Viewed this way, the tension between conceptual and figurative occurs as a complication of the extreme manifestation of the conceptual, that is, its hypostatization or reification. This point will become clearer in the following discussion of the “metaphysical bias,” a symptom of the nihilistic spirit that has crept into the core of knowledge formation.

Nietzsche uses various terms or metaphors to describe specific characteristics or expressions of the nihilistic spirit, which to him has grown to be a dominant ideal in the various dimensions of Western culture, e.g., the ascetic ideal, *ressentiment*, spirit of revenge, fiction, poison, dogmatism, to list some of them. Ultimately, all these expressions or analogues of the nihilistic spirit are rooted in, philosophically speaking, a conception of truth and value that accepts the Platonic bifurcation of the world into the “true” world of forms and the “false” world of appearance;⁶⁷ a worldview which, to Nietzsche, stems from our apprehensive attitude towards the temporal character of existence. Since the successful inception of this mode of

⁶⁶ Breazeale, “Note on the Text, Translation and Annotation,” in *Philosophy and Truth: Selections From Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870's*, lix, note 10.

⁶⁷ In *The Republic*, Plato uses two literary devices to explain the bifurcated world, the Divided Line- and Cave Allegory, books 6 and 7, respectively: “Imagine taking a line which has been divided into two unequal sections, and dividing each section—the one representing the category of the seen and the one representing the category of the understood—again in the same proportion,” “The region revealed to us by sight is the prison dwelling, and the light of the fire inside the dwelling is the power of the sun. If you identify the upward path and the view of things above with the ascent of the soul to the realm of understanding, then you will have caught my drift . . . My own view, for what it's worth, is that the realm of what can be known the thing seen last, and seen with great difficulty, is the form or character of the good.” *The Republic*, trans. by Tom Griffith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), Book 6 509d-509e, Book 7 571b.

thinking, via Platonism, it has become an indispensable bias in the Western philosophical tradition. The devaluation of the material conditions of life—or the metaphysicians’ fear of temporality—has become the creed of Western philosophers. For Nietzsche, the alliance between nihilism and philosophy is called “metaphysics.” It is important to situate Nietzsche’s engagement with the material structure of language within his critique of metaphysics. What I hope to show is that the socio-historico origin of language, which the young Nietzsche attempted to painstakingly expose, is dissimulated by the metaphysical bias of the Western philosophical tradition.

With regard to the now popular stance against metaphysics, at least in the tradition of 20th and 21st century Continental thought, Nietzsche is perhaps the most often quoted source. What this entails, in general, is the attempt of Nietzsche-inspired writers—such as Heidegger, Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida, Adorno, to name a few—to adventurously declare the demise of metaphysics as a gesture of philosophy’s departure from the fossilized foundations of what is commonly regarded as Western philosophy—generally regarded as a collective body of knowledge of diverse metaphysical accounts of truth, knowledge, morality, justice, and so on. Although Nietzsche is today regarded by many as the “father of anti-foundationalist” or “anti-metaphysical” thought, his exact position, if based on the plethora of varied and often contradicting appropriations, continues

to defy a definitive account.⁶⁸ The myriad of approaches and genres he uses affect the form, and thus content, of his works;⁶⁹ we could observe that among the so-called great German writers, Nietzsche takes the freedom of shifting from one genre to another—between poignant analytic observations, destructive polemics, and the most profound metaphorical imageries. This “maverick” style of writing or philosophizing built on the “anti-foundationalist” or “anti-systematic” character of the Nietzschean text has been used by his supporters to warrant his current designation as progenitor of anti-metaphysical philosophy, and, I believe, rightly so. Nevertheless, Nietzsche is a product of his time—philosophically, a product of an

⁶⁸ We could, however, identify at least three principal assimilations of Nietzschean ideas: 1) the German assimilation, 2) the French assimilation, and 3) the Anglo-American assimilation. For a more comprehensive discussion of these assimilations, consult Peter Sedgwick, “Introduction: Nietzsche Institutions,” in *Nietzsche: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995). The following are also important representative works: David B. Allison ed., *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1877); Keith Ansell-Pearson ed., *Nietzsche and Modern German Thought* (London: Routledge, 1991); Farrell-Krell, David and David C. Wood eds., *Exceedingly Nietzsche: Aspects of Contemporary Nietzsche-Interpretation* (London: Routledge, 1988); Clayton Koelb ed., *Nietzsche as Postmodernist: Essays Pro and Contra* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990); Manfred Putz ed., *Nietzsche in American Literature and Thought* (Columbia: Camden House, 1995); Laurence A. Rickels ed., *Looking After Nietzsche* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990); Alan D. Schrift, *Nietzsche's French Legacy: A Genealogy of Poststructuralism* (New York: Routledge, 1995); and Robert C. Solomon ed., *Nietzsche: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973).

⁶⁹ Perhaps Nietzsche's style of writing is a way of protecting himself, according to Derrida, “against whatever terrifying, blinding, or mortal threat might present itself or be obstinately encountered: i.e., the presence, and, hence, the content, of things themselves, of meaning, of unveiling of difference,” which is perhaps the reason why Nietzsche oftentimes parodies the language of academic philosophers. See Jacques Derrida, “The Question of Style,” trans. by Ruben Berezdivin, in *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation* (New York: Delta Book, 1977), 176-ff.

intellectual tradition which emerged at the wake of Kantianism and Hegelianism, and in broader terms German Idealism and Romanticism, as pointed out in the preceding chapter. It is interesting to note, however, that German Idealism and *Systemphilosophie* began to decline shortly after the deaths of Kant in 1804 and Hegel in 1831. In other words, Nietzsche was nurtured in an intellectual environment where the philosophical practice of system-building grounded in the authoritative presuppositions of metaphysics was already openly dismantled. Nietzsche shares with Hamann and the early German Romantics an ambivalent relation to the philosophy of Kant and the same can also be said about Nietzsche's reaction to the works of Hegel. Understood within this context, the radicalism of Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics is diminished to some degree, but, at the same time, it becomes less problematic and more benign than is usually regarded. Nevertheless, the critique of metaphysics still has radical consequences for philosophy as a whole and Nietzsche's designation as the father of anti-metaphysical thinking is still appropriate inasmuch as he is the most vocal, blunt, and, arguably, most consistent in temperament among the early anti-metaphysicians. In the following reconstruction of Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics, I will focus on two things: 1) the nihilistic spirit and its relation to the metaphysical notion of truth and 2) Nietzsche's exposure of the linguistic basis of the metaphysical notion of truth.

As mentioned above, the theoretical locus of Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics is the Platonic separation between the true world of forms and the false world of appearance which, according to Nietzsche, is a complication of the existential fear of temporality. A further complication which arose from this separation is the formulation or invention of philosophical distinctions between eternity and finitude, reason and nature, mind and body, knowledge and non-knowledge, true and false. Nietzsche observed two things from the complications of metaphysical thought: 1) first is the privileged status accorded to one category over another, viz., the permanent forms over the world of phenomena, eternity over finitude, reason over nature, mind over body, knowledge over non-knowledge, true over false; 2) second is the dissimulation of the material conditions that make knowledge acquisition or creation possible. It will become clear in the succeeding sections that the metonymic character of language is the basic structure of language usage; but, at this juncture, it would help to flag the idea that, for Nietzsche, metaphysics is the advanced dissimulation of the linguistic origin of thought. One very common example that Nietzsche offers is the hypostasized or reified notion of the subject; he writes that metaphysicians "think that they show their *respect* for a subject when they de-historicize it, *sub specie aeterni*—when they turn it into a mummy" (*TI* III, 1). By getting around the human being of flesh and bone, metaphysicians fantasize about identifying an eternal being, unaffected by human

physiology, deemed as the substantial form that guarantees the being of the concrete subject; hence, the ontological notion of the “I” or “ego” (the de-historicized subject) is invented. What this metaphysical model fails to realize, according to Nietzsche, is that the notion of the ego, as opposed to being regarded as a causal principle, is in fact a byproduct of the “seduction of grammar” which runs at the background of thinking, an “unconscious domination and guidance by similar grammatical functions” (BGE 20). In other words, the “I” or “ego” is inscribed through thought, and thought through language. However, this “I” or “ego” is conventionally regarded as “something of immediate certainty” and mistakenly construed as “the given *cause* of thought, from which by analogy we understood all other causal relationships” (WP 483). We, therefore, embellish the naked and frail body with the eternalized and immutable “soul” or “being behind doing, effecting, becoming” (GM I, 13). However, Nietzsche remarks that we fail to recognize that “the doer is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything” (GM I, 13), that is to say, that the conceptualization of the “I” or “ego” is a result of the dynamism of language and that such mummification, *eternalization*, or reification of the subject is simply a petrification of a grammatical habit.⁷⁰ When Nietzsche remarks that “the deed is everything,”

⁷⁰ Nietzsche further writes in *On the Genealogy of Morals*: “The popular mind in fact doubles the deed; when it sees the lightning flash, it is the deed of a deed: it posits the same event first as cause and then a second time as its effect. Scientists do no better when they say ‘force moves,’ ‘force causes,’ and the like—all its coolness, its freedom from emotion

he is obviously referring here to the primacy of somatic activity and regards thinking as itself a somatic process.

We could further infer from the above that the forgetfulness of the linguistic origin of metaphysics is, for Nietzsche, the denial of the conditions of life, that is to say, resentment towards the temporal and chaotic character of life. By denying the material conditions of its origin and its disgust towards temporality, metaphysics found incumbent upon itself to posit a "beyond" or, in Plato's terms, a world of permanent forms. This, for Nietzsche, is the metaphysician's "lack of historical sense" and "hatred of the very idea of becoming" (*TI* III, 1). Positing an "immaterial beyond" required a turning away from life and, as a further step, the suppression of human creative impulses. From the purview of metaphysics, the role of somatic impulses has shifted, at least in principle, from aiding us with our concrete and often perilous struggle with the earth to pacifying our fear of the temporal by assuming that ultimate satisfaction is only found in a beyond. It is through this metaphysical illusion that death, for instance, ceases to be a concrete reality and, in our perennial struggle to conquer this temporal fate, we interpret our demise as the passageway to the peaceful beyond. "There

notwithstanding, our entire science still lies under the misleading influence of language and has not disposed of that little changeling, the 'subject' (the atom, for example, is such a changeling, as is the Kantian 'thing-in-itself') . . . The subject (or, to use a more popular expression, the *soul*) has perhaps been believed in hitherto more firmly than anything else on earth because it makes possible to the majority or mortals, the weak and oppressed of every kind, the sublime self-deception that interprets weakness as freedom, and their being thus-and-thus as a *merit*" (*GM* I, 13).

are preachers of death," Nietzsche writes in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "and the earth is full of those to whom one must preach renunciation of life" (Z 9).⁷¹ Ultimately, the metaphysical illusion has crept into all our valuations; it has become the ground of all human valuations. This is the metaphysical bias of which Nietzsche speaks about at the beginning of *Beyond Good and Evil*:

This way of judging constitutes the typical prejudgment and prejudice which give away the metaphysicians of all ages; this kind of valuation looms in the background of all their logical procedures; it is on account of this "faith" that they trouble themselves about "knowledge," about something that is finally baptized solemnly as "the truth." The fundamental faith of the metaphysicians is *the faith in opposite values*. It has not even occurred to the most cautious among them that one might have a doubt right here at the threshold where it was surely most necessary—even if they vowed to themselves, "*de omnibus dubitandum*" (BGE 2).

Put another way, the metaphysician assumes the role of the harbinger of "truth." The metaphysician follows the Platonic illusion and accepts the premise that the only possible knowledge is the knowledge of universal forms, because, according to this model, it is only when we apprehend universal forms that we are able to ascertain truth. The metaphysician, moreover, devises a method of accessing truth in all its purity and, as

⁷¹ Nietzsche continues: "The earth is full of the superfluous; life is spoiled by the all-too-many. May they be lured from this life with the 'eternal life'! Yellow the preachers of death wear, or black. . . . They are terrible ones who carry around within them themselves the beast of prey and have no choice but lust or self-laceration. . . . They encounter a sick man or an old man or a corpse, and immediately they say, 'Life is refuted.' But only they themselves are refuted, and their eyes, which see only this one face of existence. . . . 'Life is only suffering,' others say, and do not lie: see to it, then, that *you* cease! See to it, then, that the life which is only suffering ceases!" (Z I, 9).

mentioned above, this amounts to the denial or negation of the material conditions knowledge formation. One of the ways through which this compulsion towards purity is enacted is through what Nietzsche refers to as the drive towards truth. In one of its manifestations, the drive towards truth is seen as language's ability to represent an external world via the abstraction of the essential properties of worldly objects and their literal translation into judgments or propositions. For example, in Aristotelian logic, judgment is considered as the logical predication of the essential quality of an object, while the proposition is supposed to be the expression of this essential quality, that is, an expression of the relation between object (referent) and predicate (essential quality).⁷² This classical pre-Kantian view of knowledge formation does not problematize the status of the "knowing" subject, but, rather, takes for granted that the subject simply has direct access to so-called essential qualities of objects.⁷³ In the history of Western thought,

⁷² The *Organon* is a collection of several works regarded by scholars to comprise Aristotle's study of logic: *The Categories*, *On Interpretation*, *Prior Analytics*, *Posterior Analytics*, *Topics*, and *On Sophistical Refutations*. The "syllogism," regarded as the hallmark of deductive reasoning of which Aristotle is famous for, is discussed in the first book of the *Prior Analytics*: "The premiss is an affirmative or negative statement of something about some subject," "a syllogistic premiss will be simply the affirmation or negation of some predicate of some subject," "A syllogism is a form of words in which, when certain assumptions are made, something other than what has been assumed necessarily follows from the fact that the assumptions are such." *Prior Analytics*, trans. by Hugh Tredennick, in *Aristotle: The Categories, On Interpretation, Prior Analytics* (London: William Heinemann, Ltd, 1962), 199-201.

⁷³ I consider as pre-Kantian those epistemological models prior to the so called Kantian Copernican revolution formulated by Kant in his first *Critique*: "But though all our knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that it all arises out of experience. For

since Plato and Aristotle, this cognitive process has been the basis of the philosophical notion of truth. Truth, according to this model, is the correspondence between our propositions and the structure of objective reality; put another way, in order to have knowledge of objective reality, or in order to grasp the truth, our propositions should pass as rationally justified beliefs.⁷⁴ Moreover, this model suggests that what we consider as an objective world exists apart from knowledge itself, that is to say, that it is not constituted by the cognitive process itself and that it maintains its fundamental structure beyond our conceptual impositions; this implies that our conceptions arise out of our supposed *literal access* to the ontological structure of reality. Based on this model, the *well-structured* and *stable* reality is the “true” world, as opposed to a world of constant flux. Nietzsche maintains that the metaphysical bias posits that “There must be mere appearance, there must be some deception which prevents us from

it may well be that even our empirical knowledge is made up of what we receive through impressions and of what our own faculty of knowledge (sensible impressions serving merely as occasion) supplies itself. If our faculty of knowledge makes any such addition, it may be that we are not in a position to distinguish it from the raw material, until with long practice of attention we have to become skilled in separating it.” Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by Norman Kemp Smith (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 41-42. Kant also writes: “Hitherto it has been assumed that all our knowledge must conform to objects. But all attempts to extend our knowledge of objects by establishing something in regard to them *a priori*, by means of concepts, have, on this assumption, ended in failure. We must therefore make trial whether we may not have more success in the tasks of metaphysics, if we suppose that objects must conform to our knowledge.” *Ibid.*, 22.

⁷⁴ The definition of knowledge as “justified true belief” is commonly attributed to Plato. In the *Theatetus*, Socrates attempts to clarify with Theatetus the definition of knowledge as “true judgment with an account.” See Plato, *Theatetus*, trans. by M. J. Levett, in *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1997), 201d-210a.

perceiving that which has being . . ." (*TI* III, 1). Metaphysicians, moreover, find "the senses" to be the culprit—the deceiver—the one that blocks our reception of the true world. The senses lead us to an "immoral" and, thus, false perception of the world, according to the metaphysical model. The supposition that the senses are deceptive is recast in the Judeo-Christian tradition, metaphysics' most successful analogue, as the seat of sin: the body is dirty, weak, and ghastly. The metaphysical bias has indeed lured us away from "the deception of the senses, from becoming, from history, from lies" and to instill in us the "moral" ideals of "monotono-theism" and detestation of the body, "this wretched *idée fixe* of the senses, disfigured by all the fallacies of logic . . ." (*TI* III, 1). The *right* perception of the true world entails the abandonment of the body, of everything that is material. The presupposition of a true world is part of the logic that is at play in denouncing the chaotic character of the material world; the juxtaposition between the true world and the material world results in the supposition that the latter is the "false" world on the basis of its *perceived* instability.

According to Nietzsche, the "fundamental faith of the metaphysicians is *the faith in opposite values*"—this perhaps entails two things. First is that, metaphysicians seek truth beyond the realm of experience; they do this by negating the material world and by positing an a priori structure upon which all materiality is structured. Second is that, and as a result of the first, the world is bifurcated into the material world of flux (false world) and the

permanent world of forms (true world). The valuations that ensue are complications of this bifurcated world: good and evil, courage and cowardice, beautiful and ugly, and so on. Nietzsche is critical of the metaphysical gesture of seeking truth beyond the materiality of experience; he finds this gesture as the tendency of metaphysical thinking to ignore the role of language in the formation of concepts. The metaphysical faith in opposite values could, moreover, entail the obliviousness of philosophers/metaphysicians to the metonymic structure of language—that language, as opposed to the traditional view just outlined, is not a direct medium for representing what is otherwise known as objective reality.

We see from the foregoing that the metaphysical bifurcation of the world into true and false is based on the opposition between a stable unified world and an unstable world of becoming. This already provides a picture of the relationship between metaphysics and the truth drive, in the sense that the metaphysical worldview posits a logical, stable, moral, in other words, true world, yet concealed by our illogical, unstable, immoral, in other words, false sensuous conception of the world. Metaphysics, in this context, makes at least two interrelated valuations: 1) the conception of the true world of stability and 2) the denial of the false world of becoming in order to give way to a noumenal world of pure essences. The reification of the subject (I/ego) is characterized above as a variant of this metaphysical double gesture. Moreover, with the metaphysical belief in opposite values, a privileged

status is accorded to the Good which creates the logical (true) world above the illogical (false) world and, thus, the moral- against the immoral world. In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche calls this goal of positing an idealized true world as the "ascetic ideal," he writes:

That which *constrains* these men, however, this unconditional will to truth, is *faith in the ascetic ideal itself*, even if as an unconscious imperative—don't be deceived about that—it is the faith in a *metaphysical* value, the absolute value of *truth*, sanctioned and guaranteed by this ideal alone . . . (GM III, 24).

Nietzsche, moreover, claims that "The ascetic ideal expresses a will: *where* is the opposing will that might express an opposing ideal?" (GM III, 23). The ascetic ideal represents the triumph of the nihilistic spirit. The nihilistic spirit is also understood by Nietzsche as the spirit of revenge, "this hatred of the human, and even more of the animal . . . an aversion to life, a rebellion against the most fundamental presuppositions of life . . ." (GM III, 28). The spirit of revenge, according to Gilles Deleuze, "is the genealogical element of *our* thought, the transcendental principle of our way of thinking."⁷⁵ The spirit of revenge, symptomatic of the ascetic ideal, becomes the genealogical element of our thought inasmuch as it is precisely the metaphysical bias upon which all our anthropological valuations are based. If we accept Deleuze's description of the spirit of revenge, then Nietzsche's genealogical account of nihilism would largely resemble Adorno- and

⁷⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 35.

Horkheimer's history of Enlightenment "gone wrong" in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The development of the spirit of revenge (Nietzsche) or domination (Adorno-Horkheimer) has psychosocial implications and should not be seen as simply originating from formal causal principles, but, rather, from natural history. The spirit of revenge, in other words, is a "naturalized" psychological impulse, resulting from a pathological turn in the aforementioned fear of instability or becoming. In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer recast this process within the context of the pathological turn of reason resulting to the "naturalization" of domination, also referred to as reification. Meanwhile, Nietzsche sees metaphysics as an expression of this hypostasized nihilistic worldview which takes on the task of devaluing the material conditions of life. However, the true world of the metaphysicians is, for Nietzsche, a "world of pure fiction":

This *world of pure fiction* . . . falsifies, devalues, and negates reality. Once the concept of "nature" had been invented as the opposite of "God," "natural" had to become a synonym of "reprehensible": this whole world of fiction is rooted in *hatred* of the natural (of reality!); it is the expression of a profound vexation at the sight of reality (AC 15).

Nietzsche, moreover, points out that human suffering itself, which we associate with the false world of appearance, is the very reason why the metaphysician *lies* his way out of reality. "The preponderance of feelings of displeasure over feelings of pleasure," Nietzsche remarks, "is the cause of

this fictitious morality and religion; but such a preponderance provides the very formula for decadence" (AC 15). Nietzsche's declaration in *Beyond Good and Evil* that "Christianity is Platonism for the people" (BGE preface) reveals that the predominant institutions of spirituality and intellectual life in Western culture (the Judeo-Christian tradition and the Western philosophical tradition) originate from the nihilism worldview. Nihilism, in a specific Nietzschean sense, could therefore be understood as a mode of looking at the world—a type of morality or valuation expressed most notably in philosophy and religion—that rips "out life by the root," and thus becomes "*an enemy of life*" (TI V, 1).⁷⁶ Nihilism, in this specific context, is the predominant mode of thinking that has crept into our most fundamental moral valuations and finds its most extreme expression in the ascetic ideal which, in turn, breeds a pathological sense of *ressentiment* towards life. The unfortunate consequence of such resentful outlook on life is our alienation

⁷⁶ Aaron Ridley rightly observes that Nietzsche's critique of nihilism is directed towards Christian morality inasmuch as Nietzsche regards Christianity to symptomatic of the nihilistic spirit. Ridley notes that, "also in the firing line are the various crypto-Christian moralities that have been invented to take its place—self-allegedly post-Christian, but in reality, if unwittingly, trading in Christian presuppositions for whatever force they have . . ." "Guilt Before God, or God Before Guilt?," in *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 29 (Spring 2005), 42. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche writes, "God is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown" (GS 108). Deleuze interprets this as a critique of the Modern ethos itself. The usurpation of God's throne by man (see Z IV, 13.2) has an ambivalent relation to Nietzsche's critique of nihilism. The death of God does not only imply the rise of the "higher man" but also of the man of *ressentiment*. This means that the same nihilistic values continue to thrive in a post-theistic world. In the Modern world, according to Deleuze, "morals replace religion; utility, progress, even history replace divine values." Gilles Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life*, trans. by Anne Boyman (New York: Zone Books, 2001), 80.

from the richness of our material lifeworld or, in other words, our alienation from experience. Nietzsche's critique of nihilism is inspired by an existential and cultural-historical outlook on life and, as we shall see in later chapters, Adorno also draws inspiration from the normativity of our material lifeworld.

B. Reification, Metaphor, and the Pragmatic Notion of Truth

The philosopher, the incarnation of the clever beast, according to Nietzsche, is "the proudest of all men" for he "supposes that he sees on all sides the eyes of the universe telescopically focused upon his action and thought" (TL I, 79). But, nonetheless, to be a philosopher is to be fraught with irony, for "The pride connected with knowing and sensing lies like a blinding fog over the eyes and senses of men, thus, deceiving them concerning the value of existence" (TL I, 80). As such, this blinding pride carries within itself a *deceptive* estimation of the value of knowledge. Nietzsche observes: "In so far as the individual wants to maintain himself against other individuals, he will under natural circumstances employ the intellect mainly for dissimulation" (TL I, 81). The instinct to maintain oneself from other individuals is symptomatic of the drive towards self-preservation. This, however, is quickly dissimulated and is transformed into something more complex: "man wishes to exist socially and with the herd; therefore, he needs to make peace and strives accordingly to banish from this world at least the most flagrant *bellum omni contra omnes*" (TL I, 81). The

"puzzling truth drive" is, therefore, a byproduct of this "peace treaty" to end the war of each against all which is further translated into social convention. For Nietzsche, truth is, therefore, "a uniformly valid and binding designation" for things legislated through no other than language itself (*TL* I, 81). Language, in this context, is considered as the fabric of social convention and operates, more like a compromise, to sustain the normative foundation of social existence in all its facets. "Language does not desire to instruct," Nietzsche maintains, "but to convey to others a subjective impulse and its acceptance" (*DAR* III, 21). So, as opposed to functioning as a medium for the attainment of truth via knowledge, language functions as a social lubricant in the guise of truth. The language-truth relation is indeed complex and, at bottom, "there is a tension between their pragmatic origins and the roles which they are destined to play within society, roles which the dissimulating structure of truth and language themselves determine."⁷⁷ A well-organized/rational/true world can only function according to the overarching normative discourse that the dissimulation of language and truth instigates if, in the first place, this discourse, as part of its normative function, hides its social and material origin; this is done by inventing another type of origin, that is, the metaphysical one.

Nietzsche's aim is to recover the concealed material origin of our valuation of truth. Since the invention of truth is structurally a linguistic

⁷⁷ Klein, *Nietzsche and the Promise of Philosophy*), 65.

construction, the recovery of the material, as opposed to the metaphysical, origin of this valuation begins with an inquiry into the structural foundations of language. Nietzsche begins his recovery by asking, “What is a word?” He then answers his own question:

It is a copy in sound of a nerve stimulus. But the further inference from the nerve stimulus to a cause outside of us is already the result of a false and unjustifiable application of the principle of sufficient reason. If truth alone had been the deciding factor in the genesis of language, and if the standpoint of certainty had been decisive for designations, then how could we still dare to say “the stone is hard,” as if “hard” were something otherwise familiar to us, and not merely a totally subjective stimulation! (TL I, 81-82).

We gather from the above passage that a “word” is a byproduct of a physiological process: “a copy in sound of a nerve stimulus.” The presence of a nerve stimulus entails the presence of a corresponding external referent. Nietzsche is, of course, not denying the existence of actual physical objects. Rather, he is critical of the correspondence theory which underlies the conventional way we understand the process of “naming” objects. To make the conjecture that an *adequatio intellectus ad rem* is in place, or that a transcendent truth is encoded in the words that we use apart from the physiology of cognition, by virtue of the nerve stimulus is in itself already a linguistic claim. Nietzsche is questioning the practice of justifying truth-claims via transcendental realism that dissimulates the physiological origin of conceptualization. In the example “the stone is hard,” Nietzsche shows us

how such a statement ends up getting imposed upon an external object we conventionally refer to by the word "stone"; the predicate "hard" is a "subjective stimulation" or another word we conventionally use to describe how the external object *appears* to us. Nietzsche observes that we are not simply *reacting* to an external stimulus, but we are rather *actively* involved in the *creation* of words, albeit this active involvement is hidden from most of us. "It is only by means of forgetfulness," Nietzsche admonishes, "that man can ever reach the point of fancying himself to possess a 'truth'" (TL I, 81). In a sense, because we ignore this normative component of language and truth—our active involvement in the creation of words—we end up being passive users of language. It is crucial to note that for Nietzsche our "active" or "creative" participation in the cognitive process could be described as "aesthetic": "between subject and object, there is no causality, no correctness, and no expression; there is, at most, an *aesthetic* relation . . . a freely intermediate sphere and mediating force" (TL I, 86).

Behind this "aesthetic relation" that Nietzsche proposes are earlier claims made by Kant, Schopenhauer, and Lange regarding the "intermediate" structure of cognition: we can never ascertain the nature of objects as they are and that what we can only perceive are our impressions of these objects as they appear to us.⁷⁸ While, to some degree, Nietzsche is

⁷⁸ The following passages are relevant: "Appearances, so far as they are thought as objects according to the unity of the categories, are called *phenomena*. But if I postulate

indeed indebted to these three thinkers, he actually goes beyond them by emphasizing the linguistic constitution of knowledge, specifically, its “metonymic” structure; on this regard, he comes closer to Hamann. Nietzsche shifts from a purely ontological description of *ideogenesis* to a metonymic description:

. . . it is not the things that pass over into consciousness, but the manner in which we stand toward them The full essence of things will never be grasped. Our utterances by no means wait until our perception and experience have provided us with a many-sided, somehow respectable knowledge of things; they result immediately when the impulse is perceived. Instead of a thing, the sensation takes in only a sign (*DAR* III, 23).⁷⁹

To some extent this appears as a restatement of the Kantian distinction between phenomena and noumena. But, in contrast to Kant, Nietzsche is not concerned here with a priori “categories of the understanding” that ontologically condition our perception of objects, but rather “the manner in which we stand toward” objects refers to the dynamics

things which are mere objects of understanding, and which, nevertheless, can be given as such to an intuition, although not to one that is sensible . . . such things would be entitled *noumena* . . .” Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 265-266; “ . . . all that exists for knowledge, and therefore this whole world, is only object in relation to subject, perception of a perceiver, in a word idea.” Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, Vol. 1, trans. by R. B. Haldane and J. Kemp (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd, 1950), 3; also see Frederick Lange’s exposition of the origin of the *Ding-an-sich* in *The History of Materialism and Criticism of its Present Importance*, trans. by Ernest Chester Thomas (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd, 1957), 235-294.

⁷⁹ Nietzsche also writes: “Man, who forms language, does not perceive things or events, but *impulses*: he does not communicate sensations, but merely copies of sensations. The sensation, evoked through a nerve impulse, does not take in the thing itself: this sensation is presented externally through an image” (*DAR* III, 21).

of language and how it plays out with the human intellect. The passage also indicates that Nietzsche does not simply deny the external world, but simply observes that the "full essence of things will never be grasped." Perception, as a component of a complex network of symbolic significations, can only provide mediated and indirect access to the objective world: "language never expresses something completely, but displays only a characteristic which appears to be prominent . . ." (*DAR* III, 23). Taking again to Nietzsche's example of a "hard stone," the description of "hardness" does not totally grasp the totality of what the stone is. It is, at its best, a metaphoric description. This is explained as a twofold metaphoric process in "On Truth and Lies": "a nerve stimulus is transferred into an image: first metaphor. The image, in turn, is imitated in a sound: second metaphor" (*TL* I, 82).⁸⁰ Here, Nietzsche is describing the linguistic structure of how we experience objects; as opposed to the belief that we know something about objects—stone, trees, flowers, etc—we only possess metaphors that do not correspond to the actual properties of these objects.

We can observe that in both the "Description of Ancient Rhetoric" and "On Truth and Lies" the notions of "metonymy" and "metaphor" take center stage. Metonymy is described in the notes on rhetoric as "the placement of

⁸⁰ Nietzsche's use of the term "metaphor" is, of course, idiosyncratic and goes beyond its traditional conception, as simply an exchange based on a similarity, to a carrying over of meaning or transference (*Übertragung*).

one noun for another" (*DAR VII*, 59) or "the substitution of cause and effect" (*DAR III*, 25). Nietzsche further remarks:

. . . we attribute to the appearances as their cause that which still is only an effect. The *abstracta* evoke the illusion that they themselves are these essences which cause the qualities, whereas they receive a metaphorical reality only from us . . . (*DAR VII*, 59).

The above passage could be read as Nietzsche's description of the process of reification, where an "effect," in the form of a sign or a concept, gets hypostasized at the expense of the actual object. We mistake the "*abstracta*," the conceptual byproduct of a nerve stimulus, as the cause of the object. Through this process, if we use the "hard stone" example once more, we mistake "hardness" as the defining feature of the stone, hardness and stone become equal: the effect becomes the cause. In other words, "hardness" is actually just an effect that we experience as a nerve stimulus which is projected back to the object.⁸¹ What we usually regard as literal or straightforward is actually just metaphorical—for we tend to forget "that the original perceptual metaphors are metaphors" and take "them to be the things themselves" (*TL I*, 86). To say "the stone is hard" is, therefore, to express a metonymic statement, inasmuch as there is a substitution of cause

⁸¹ De Man comments: "The outer, objective event in the world was supposed to determine the inner, conscious event as cause determines effect. It turns out however that what was assumed to be the objective, external cause is itself the result of an internal effect. What had been considered to be a cause, is, in fact, the effect of an effect, and what had been considered to be an effect can in its turn seem to function as the cause of its own cause." *Allegories of Reading*, 107.

and effect. What interests us here is that Nietzsche does not simply understand metonymy as an embellishment of a literal utterance but, rather, metonymy is constitutive of experience itself. Thus, the tactile feelings of "hardness," "smoothness," and "warmth" are not the immediate experiences of actual properties of external objects "derived from a relationship of identity or correspondence between the world and a sentient subject,"⁸² but rather they are occasions of a linguistic process. It is also important to indicate here that, aside from the forgetfulness of the metaphorical structure of language, there is another type of forgetfulness or blindness which arises. The second type of forgetfulness is the forgetfulness of "the unique and entirely individual original experience" as it is subsumed into the hypostasized concept. The concept "is formed by arbitrarily discarding these individual differences and by forgetting the distinguishing aspects." This process is metonymic in the sense that the subsumption of the original experience into the concept is actually a transference from the material to the abstract, wherein abstraction functions as the substitution of a universalized concept for the object or the confusion between cause and effect. The persistence of this confusion, the forgetfulness of the material object, in our linguistic transactions is called reification. Nietzsche writes in *Beyond Good and Evil*:

⁸² Klein, *Nietzsche and the Promise of Philosophy*, 68.

One should not wrongly reify “cause” and “effect,” as the natural scientists do (and whoever, like them, now “naturalizes” in thinking), according to the prevailing mechanical doltishness which makes the cause press and push until it “effects” its end; one should use “cause” and “effect” only as pure concepts, that is to say, as conventional fictions for the purpose of designation and communication—*not* for explanation (BGE 21).

This process could be further characterized as the conventionalization of experience, wherein the unique and singular experience is sacrificed for the sake of the common and familiar. Conventionalism follows the logic of the concept, that is to say, the drive towards formalization which determines and limits material experience. The Conventionalization or naturalization results in the reification of the concept: the process of legitimizing a phantom image over and against the plurality of our concrete drives, affects, and wills. In other words, in perfect unison with the metaphysical bias, the reification of the concept functions as a *perspective stabilizer*.

The crucial question that arises from the above discussion is: What is the implication of reification on knowledge formation, in general, and philosophy, in particular? The question, of course, is not just about the drive towards formalization, but, rather, involves the whole gamut of Nietzsche’s immanent critique of language. What is laid bare, thus far, is the material ground of knowledge formation which we have located in Nietzsche’s critique of the epistemological categories of truth, representation via the word, and formalization via the concept. If we gather the above exegetical

undertaking into one coherent theme or argument, we can argue, with Nietzsche, that what all these amount to is the reification of knowledge via language.

The crucial point to be made here is that our experience of the external world is linguistically constituted. Again, this is not to say that an external objective or extra-linguistic world does not exist, but, rather, that our experience of the objective world is mediated by language, which entails an aesthetic relation with the objective world. Our experience of the objective world is aesthetic for Nietzsche in the sense that, as opposed to representationalist epistemology, experience is construed as world-disclosive and perspectival-creative. Such view of experience could only be understood in a more or less materialist sense, by which I mean a keener regard for the important role of the body in the knowledge formation and world-disclosure. By highlighting the aesthetic-somatic dimension of our relation to the world, Nietzsche is able to re-contextualize his epistemology, underscoring the material conditions that make cognition and world creation possible; this could be further ramified into how knowledge is socially grounded. The importance of Nietzsche's genealogical narrative is that it highlights the historical dimension or dialectical play between language, truth, and knowledge. By exposing this dialectical structure of knowledge formation, he is able to question the commonly held belief that knowledge is a straightforward and neutral medium of representing the world of objects.

In the context of language discussed above, Nietzsche criticizes the metaphysical view for taking the role of language for granted by simply assuming that grammar functions to capture, ipso facto, the ontological structure of reality. Nietzsche points out that grammar is itself a compulsion towards stability that arises out of our repugnance for the unstable character of reality. Later on, Adorno and Horkheimer would add that this repugnance against becoming is linked to our primitive instinct for survival which develops into the instinct to master nature. Nietzsche observes that the metaphysical model does not view this as a compulsion at all, but, rather, sees it as the very method through which we could ascertain truth by bypassing the temporal world so that we could then focus our attention on the essences of things. Nietzsche, of course, uses the term grammar in both the metaphorical- and conventional sense. On the one hand, grammar is a metaphorical analogue of the precise or *reasonable* description of stability, permanence, unity, goodness, and even God; on the other hand, grammar is also used to refer to its more conventional connotation as the structure of language. These two connotations, the literal and metaphorical, play out in Nietzsche's account of language in a quite interesting way—they are used to illustrate the complex relation between language and reason. The metaphysical bias, for Nietzsche, creeps into even the most conventional language use because we give utmost priority to grammar. In other words, our obsession with grammar is symptomatic of conceptual reification. So, in

a way, grammar becomes the analogue of metaphysics, if we consider metaphysics as the hypostatization of supposed a priori categories produced by the dialectical process of cognition-language-conceptualization. It is then held that we possess metaphysical truth if we are able to ascertain these a priori categories. But, according to Nietzsche, what is lost in this tendency to hypostasize a priori categories is the material process through which such worldview is created. For Nietzsche, all perspectives are materially constituted, but his criticism of the metaphysical worldview hinges on metaphysics' tendency to downplay or totally ignore the materiality of knowledge formation. By materiality, Nietzsche is referring to somatic impulses that inform the psychological, social, and historical spheres of life. In other words, the way we know the world or what we regard as "true" about the world is largely dependent on these somatic instances. But this material factor is precisely what the metaphysical worldview neglects. So, taking this into account, it would make more sense to interpret Nietzsche's critique of truth as not simply a denial of truth, but a rethinking of how truth is constituted in the first place. If we are trying to understand the nature of truth based on its material constitution, then language is an appropriate point of departure. Nietzsche does just this in "On Truth and Lies":

What then is truth? A movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished, and which, after long usage, seem to a people to be fixed,

canonical, and binding. Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions; they are metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force, coins which have lost their embossing and are now considered as metal and no longer coins (*TL I*, 84).

There are two interrelated ways of reading the above passage. Firstly, the passage is clearly a counterclaim against the metaphysical notion of truth. Nietzsche is claiming that language (our use of words) becomes an analogue of the metaphysical bifurcation of the world (the “true” and the “false”) and along with this linguistic process that bestows to the hypostasized “true” world a primal value. This bestowal of primal value to the metaphysical world manifests itself in language as the separation of the “conceptual” and the “figurative/rhetorical/metaphorical.” Such conceptual-figurative opposition creates, on the one hand, the realm of consciousness and reality and, on the other hand, the realm of language and signification. A further relation between these two realms is that the realm of language has a secondary and even extraneous function of expressing the realm of consciousness and reality. As such, the consciousness-reality sphere does not presuppose the expression of knowledge, since knowledge is simply the correspondence between concept (consciousness) and object (reality) and, further, is not subjected to any material change in its abstract form—the essence, which is considered to be pre-linguistic. Nonetheless, if knowledge is to be articulated, then a streamlining of language is necessary, according to the metaphysical model. It is in this context that Nietzsche observes that

language becomes a simplifier of the complexity and dynamism of experience. This process of linguistic simplification reduces what is supposedly individual and unique to the common and typical. For Nietzsche, this amounts not only to the simplification of complexity but also the identification of unequal things or, in other words, the conceptual domination of material objects, resulting in the hypostatization or reification of concepts. Secondly, the passage is obviously hyperbolic, but it is not right away clear why. A possible explanation is that Nietzsche is trying to performatively or metareflectively demonstrate the rhetorical use (e.g., "coins which have lost their embossing and are now considered as metal and no longer coins") of language to explain the rhetorical or metaphorical structure of language. Interestingly, through these conceptual metaphors, Nietzsche is able to bring out a concise story of the origin of linguistic reification. The passage abandons neither a concept of truth nor language per se. On the contrary, the passage reveals the linguistic, hence material, basis of truth, as well as the limitations of language to capture the complexity of reality.⁸³ Taking the linguistic reinscription of truth into

⁸³ In a *Nachlass* note written most probably between 1887 to 1888, Nietzsche observes that, "Linguistic means of expression are useless for expressing 'becoming'; it accords with our inevitable need to preserve ourselves to posit a crude world of stability, of 'things,' etc" (WP 715). Some commentators think that this passage reveals Nietzsche's major charge against language, for example, Stephen Houlgate in *Hegel, Nietzsche and the Criticism of Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 45. However, it is worth pointing out that Nietzsche's intention is not simply to abandon language altogether. Rather, he is emphatically claiming that language cannot capture completely the complexity

consideration, Nietzsche presents us an alternative version of truth, in opposition to the metaphysical, that is to say, simplified, hypostasized, grammatical conception of the world.

The metaphysical model ignores the diversity of reality by using language to make all things equal, that is, by lumping all things under the banner of universalized identity; this is done by classifying unequal things into classes and categories, plus the assumption that things under a class are essentially equal: “the belief that something is thus and thus,” Nietzsche writes, “is the consequence of a will that as much as possible *shall* be equal” (WP 511). Antedating Adorno, Nietzsche views this imposition of identity as an anthropological reaction to nature or becoming, that is, one of fear of the unknown and need of security through mastery. In a *Nachlass* entry written on the Fall of 1886, we read:

The inventive force that invented categories labored in the service of our needs, namely of our need for security, for quick understanding on the basis of signs and sounds, for means of abbreviation:--“substance,” “subject,” “object,” “being,” “becoming” have nothing to do with metaphysical truths . . . It is the powerful who made the names of things into law . . . (WP 513).

So, in a sense, conceptual categories, for Nietzsche, are still necessary, but they do not exactly capture the whole of reality. They are necessary “lies.” Once more, Nietzsche hyperbolically declares that “All lies are

of the world of becoming; both literal- and metaphorical language are powerless before this complexity. Nietzsche goes beyond the Cratylean view that the only option in the face of language’s limited power is the total abandonment of language and the lapsing into silence.

necessary lies." The term "lie" has a special signification for Nietzsche. Lies are necessary for us humans because only belief in some reassuring truth is proper for our survival. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche links necessary lying to the aesthetic creation of the world, that is, that the world is only "bearable" as an aesthetic phenomenon (GS 107). Elsewhere, he refers to lying as "artistic pleasure": "Artistic pleasure the greatest kind because it speaks the truth quite generally in the form of lies" (UW XXIX, 189). Here, Nietzsche is claiming at least two things. Firstly, in relation to the above quoted *Nachlass* entry, he is claiming that, strictly speaking, there is no essential connection between our conceptual apparatus and the world as it is. The influence of Kantian epistemology, via Schopenhauer, reverberates in this claim. Put another way, the world is indifferent to the language that we use to describe or apprehend it. This, however, neither means that Nietzsche is guilty of solipsism nor is he repeating the old ontological mistake of bifurcating thought and world. One could, at least, safely say that what he is simply claiming is that our conceptual apparatus cannot, or perhaps should not, have a totalized grasp of the world in all its complexity, diversity, and the individuality of its objects. Secondly, as opposed to solipsism and a dualistic worldview, Nietzsche acknowledges the necessity of what he refers to as "voluntary lies" (UW XXIX, 189) which could be interpreted as our "artistic" or "aesthetic," and necessarily linguistic, relation to the world. Through this second claim, the rhetorical or metaphorical structure of

language, as an experiential intermediary, is emphasized. Moreover, with this insight, Nietzsche is able to respond to the objection that considers his critique of the notion of truth as a wholesale denigration of truth. Contrary to this objection, an emphatic view of the metaphorical structure of language reinscribes the possibility of knowing the world without relapsing into the classical epistemological principle of adequation. So while Nietzsche denounces all attempts to demonstrate that concepts correspond to reality, he, nonetheless, considers concepts in a somewhat pragmatic manner. This strain of pragmatic conception of truth is perhaps an inflection of Schopenhauer's pragmatic notion of human will. Schopenhauer thinks that human will profoundly informs human knowledge which, to some extent, resembles Freud's notion of the id as a drive that motivates human behavior and, in particular, the experience of pleasure.⁸⁴ Nietzsche recasts the Schopenhauerian will into the human propensity for power, that is, the anthropomorphic conception or, in its most extreme manifestation, domination of the world. So, as opposed to a straightforwardly representational view of knowledge, common to the metaphysical model, Nietzsche understands knowledge as fundamentality creative or, in its extreme expression, instrumental. Knowledge, in this sense, is "the metamorphosis of the world in to man" (*TL* I, 85-86).

⁸⁴ See, for example, R. K. Gupta, "Freud and Schopenhauer," in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 36:4 (1975), 721-728 and also Stanley Cavell, "Freud and Philosophy: A Fragment," in *Critical Inquiry*, 13:2, The Trial(s) of Psychoanalysis (Winter 1987), 386-393.

I do not find this pragmatic or neo-pragmatic turn in Nietzsche's epistemology necessarily problematic. However, some defenders of this neo-pragmatic turn polemicize on this issue too much or they locate the turn way too late in Nietzsche's corpus, resulting in an unnecessary demarcation between the early and the mature Nietzsche. In particular, Maudmarie Clark argues that Nietzsche abandoned his early musings on the linguistic structure of truth in order to take up such position. As a matter of fact, this pragmatic tendency is already evident in the early Nietzsche. According to Clark, Nietzsche abandoned his notion of the metaphorical structure of language because he could not defend it without risking a paradoxical self-contradiction: if all knowledge is metaphorical, then this claim is itself metaphorical and, hence, could not be taken seriously.⁸⁵ Clark also returns to the inconsistency of the idea of the Dionysian in *The Birth of Tragedy* as the only possible perspective that can recognize things-in-themselves and dubs this as Nietzsche's version of the correspondence theory. Clark, then, concludes that, the only way Nietzsche could redeem his perspectival theory of truth was to abandon his early musings in *The Birth of Tragedy* and "On Truth and Lies."⁸⁶ Clark misses at least three crucial aspects in Nietzsche's

⁸⁵ Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, 70-78. Similar objections to Nietzsche's use of the metaphorical can be found in Lawrence M. Hinman, "Nietzsche, Metaphor, and Truth," in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 43 (1982), 192; Houlgate, *Hegel, Nietzsche and the Criticism of Metaphysics*, 48; and J. P. Stern, "Nietzsche and the Idea of Metaphor," in *Nietzsche, Imagery and Thought: A Collection of Essays* (London: Methuen, 1978), 74.

⁸⁶ Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, 63-125.

account. First, Nietzsche's insistence on the metaphorical structure of language in "On Truth and Lies" is meant to disclose a dissimulated feature of language that is itself presented as a counterweight to language's rigid logical form. He is trying to show that the hypostasized logical form of language forgets its roots in metaphor and in the physiology of cognition. Second, his description of the physiological structure of cognition demonstrates the "artistic" or "aesthetic" character of knowledge formation. Third, Clark seems to present a too literal reading of Nietzsche's early view on language which undermines not only its deeply aesthetic implications, but also its significance in the development of his more mature works. Clark seems to downplay the fact that Nietzsche's early epistemology formed the basis and general tenor of his more mature critique of reason. For instance, the following passage from "'Reason' in Philosophy" in *Twilight of the Idols* is seen by Clark as representative of Nietzsche's complete shift from a linguistic notion of truth to a common sense and positivistic notion of truth:⁸⁷

What we *make* of their testimony [senses], that alone introduces lies; for example, the lie of unity, the lie of thinghood, of substance, of permanence. "Reason" is the cause of our falsification of the testimony of the senses. Insofar as the senses show becoming, passing away, and change, they do not lie (*TI* III, 2).

In direct opposition to Clark's position, Wayne Klein points out, with reference to the above passage, that Nietzsche's emphasis of the word

⁸⁷ See *ibid.*, 106.

"make" (*machen*) makes all the difference.⁸⁸ As a regulative verb, the word "make" implies the subject's active involvement in the interpretation of the testimony of the senses. Not only is the intermediate structure of knowledge formation highlighted here, but also the creative, indeed, metaphorical structure of our conceptual faculty. Many will see Nietzsche's use of the term "Reason" to refer to the falsification of the testimony of the senses problematic, inasmuch as it raises the question about the validity status of his claim. Is Nietzsche saying the "truth" about "Reason?" Is he prescribing a philosophical doctrine? Is he merely provoking his readers, thus, should not be taken seriously by philosophers? It is not easy to respond to these vexed questions. However, while risking appearing outlandish, it is possible to say that Nietzsche actually does all three: he is saying something "truthful" about Reason, he is prescribing a way of understanding Reason, and he is also provoking or deconstructing the conventional way we construe Reason. The real question, to my mind, is: what for? One could respond to this question by saying that Nietzsche is intending to disclose something about Reason that is usually disregarded by traditional philosophy; more specifically, a disclosure of how the history of human Reason is also the history of the systematic repression of our somatic constitution and simultaneously the dissimulation of the mimetic or metaphorical dimension of human cognition. The term "Reason," as used by

⁸⁸ See Klein, *Nietzsche and the Promise of Philosophy*, 90.

Nietzsche, is of course pre-loaded and it specifically denotes the anthropomorphic tendency to organize and master the world of objects; this is very similar to, if not the same as, Adorno- and Horkheimer's use of the term "rationality" in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Klein, moreover, points out that Clark misses the real context of Nietzsche's critique of Reason and its relation to language by not considering Nietzsche's shift of emphasis in Section 5 of "'Reason' in Philosophy":

In its origin language belongs in the age of the most rudimentary form of psychology. We enter a realm of crude fetishism when we summon before consciousness the basic presuppositions of the metaphysics of language, in plain talk, the presuppositions of reason. . . . In the beginning there is that great calamity of an error that the will is something which is effective, that will is a capacity. Today we know that it is only a word. . . . "Reason" in language—oh, what an old deceptive female she is! I am afraid we are not rid of God because we still have faith in grammar (*TI* III, 5).

Nietzsche shifts his emphasis from Reason "as the cause of our falsification of the testimony of the senses" to the basic tendency of language towards "crude fetishism" brought about by positing the "presuppositions of the metaphysics of language" or, in other words, reason in the body of hypostasized grammar or conceptual reification. In this sense, as Klein maintains, Nietzsche "locates reason itself within language."⁸⁹ This means that reason is itself constituted by language. If such is the case, then this passage from the *Twilight of the Idols* is consistent with Nietzsche's earlier,

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 92.

albeit less refined, critique of the reification of conceptual language and the fundamental aesthetic character of the cognitive process in "On Truth and Lies" noted earlier. If we interpret Nietzsche's project this way, not only is it possible to locate the continuity between his early and mature works, but we are also in a better position to tell a story about the metaphorical structure of reason itself. Within this context, Nietzsche's critique of language is neither a total negation of language nor of reason, but, rather, is a condition for the reinscription of metaphorical language. It also becomes clear that what Nietzsche wishes to subvert are the ramifications of a discourse, philosophical or otherwise, that bestows primacy to metaphysical or an austere concept of reason that robs human experience of all its vitality. Beyond Clark, it is, therefore, possible to construe Nietzsche's pragmatic epistemology without making the polemical claim that he abandoned his early aesthetic view of language. On the contrary, his pragmatic epistemology is not only compatible with this aesthetic view of language, but should be read within the context of the latter, that is, that our anthropomorphic conception of the world is fundamentally metaphorical.

C. The Recovery of Reason and the Reinscription of Metaphor

As we gather from the preceding sections, the metaphysical notion of truth, as opposed to the pragmatic, is an offshoot of the metaphysical illusion of a beyond or of an "opposite" of life that is taken to be more worthy than life itself. In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche admonishes that philosophers

have “rejected the testimony of the senses because they showed multiplicity and change” and have, instead, created the illusion of “permanence and unity” (*TI III, 2*). Nietzsche, moreover, argues that we falsify the testimony of our senses—that is to say, we prioritize permanence over change and unity over multiplicity—because we want to perceive reality as “reasonable” (*TI III, 2*). While Nietzsche could be accused, for example by Georg Lukács and Jürgen Habermas, of committing a self-referential paradox by criticizing reason while being ambiguous about the normative basis of his criticism—resulting to either sheer irrationalism or performative contradiction⁹⁰—one could, at least, consider the implications of his critique of nihilism in order to assume the context of his critique of reason. Of course, Nietzsche’s tendency to hyperbolize the term “reason” itself makes it quite a challenge to view his project beyond his image as a “destroyer of reason,” but the only way to get around this difficulty is to put his critique of reason within the larger context of his overall enterprise of a critique of nihilism and his theory of knowledge.

If the central argument of Adorno- and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*—that is, “that reason has become irrational precisely because

⁹⁰ See Georg Lukács, *The Destruction of Reason*, trans. by Peter R. Palmer (London: Merlin Press, 1980) and Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. by Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1990). I also address this specific issue in Chapter Five of this study.

of its attempt to expel every non-rational moment from itself"⁹¹—is all too familiar, it is because Nietzsche has already declared a similar observation: "that *piece of the world* which we know – I mean our own human rationality – is not so very rational" (*HH* II.2, 1). But what is often neglected is that Nietzsche, like Adorno and Horkheimer, exposes the irrational content of human reason in order to precisely salvage reason from its dangerous ramifications. In *Twilight of the Idols*, for instance, he calls for a "recovery of reason" (see *TI* VI, 2) which implies a reconciliatory relation between human reason and human passions. As opposed to the moralistic supposition that reason curbs the passions, Nietzsche's "recovered reason" views the function of reason as that of regulating the passions. While Nietzsche is conventionally regarded as a philosopher of power, he is nevertheless critical of the sheer infliction of brutal strength (*Kraft*).⁹² His analysis of power is more nuanced than usually thought; for, instance, in *Daybreak*, he distinguishes between strength as "custom of slaves" and the more decisive "*degree of rationality in strength*"—the latter involves the assessment of the extent to which "strength has been overcome by something higher, in the

⁹¹ Simon Jarvis, *Adorno: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 13-14.

⁹² For an interesting and convincing account of the difference between the German words *Kraft* and *Macht* as they are used in Nietzsche's works, see Jacob Golomb, "How to De-Nazify Nietzsche's Philosophical Anthropology?," in *Nietzsche, Godfather of Fascism? On the Uses and Abuses of a Philosophy* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002), 20-21. Also, for the two senses of the will to power as a "craving for worldly success" and as a deep "psychological drive," see Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974), 178-185.

service of which it now stands as means and instrument" (*D* 548). In this context, the passions are not reduced to sheer strength since reason takes them into service which renders the reason-passions relation emphatically decisive. But the passions are not simply subordinated to reason; on the contrary, reason remains parasitic to the passions, but also "retroacts" on them. What this implies is that thinking could learn a lot from the passions and the passions could be more productive through reason's retroaction. This is possible, according to Wolfgang Ivers, because Nietzsche sees the directional relation between reason and passions as "two-way" instead of "one-way."⁹³ In other words, instead of curtailing the passions, reason should bring the passions to the foreground of thought. One could surmise from this that Nietzsche did not totally abandon a notion of reason, but, rather, attempted to present a revisionist emphatic view of reason. It, therefore, makes sense for Gilles Deleuze to paint this aspect of Nietzsche's philosophy in Spinozist terms, more specifically, interpreting Nietzsche's philosophy of the body in terms of Spinoza's concept of the "parallelism" between mind and body or the view that neither the mind nor the body holds primacy over the other.⁹⁴ Viewed this way, it makes sense for

⁹³ See Wolfgang Ivers, "Nietzsche über Vernunft, 'Meine wiederhergestellte Vernunft'," in *Rationalität und Prärationalität* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1998), 107-115.

⁹⁴ Deleuze writes: "It is a matter of showing that the body surpasses the knowledge that we have of it, and that thought likewise surpasses the consciousness that we have of it."

Nietzsche to wonder in the preface of *The Gay Science* whether “philosophy has not been merely an interpretation of the body and a *misunderstanding of the body*” (GS preface, 2)—which is another way of saying that we have misunderstood the nature of knowledge because we have misunderstood how our bodies work. According to Christian J. Emden, Nietzsche was certainly a child of his time for emphasizing the inextricable relation between knowledge formation and human physiological organization,⁹⁵ but, more than this, Nietzsche's preoccupation with the body is central to his overarching concern in an understanding of what it is to be “human.”⁹⁶ This aspect of Nietzsche's epistemology is often ignored, and so it has to be highlighted again that describing knowledge formation as a metaphorical process aims to reorient us into the very human aspect of our relation with the world, that is, a recognition of the fragility of our conception of ourselves.

Nietzsche's recognition of the metaphorical, mediatory, structure of cognition leads him to the supposition that the world could only be

Spinoza: Practical Philosophy, trans. by Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988), 18.

⁹⁵ Emden is here referring to the fact that Nietzsche was writing within the context of the second half of the nineteenth century, when “the problem of language and thought is embedded in a wider intellectual framework marked by the growing influence of something we can describe as the ‘sciences of the body,’” for instance, debates about “organic electricity” and “psychophysics.” It was also during this time when “physiology” and “psychology” as distinct disciplines began to emerge in Germany. *Nietzsche on Language, Consciousness, and the Body*, 82-83.

⁹⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 87.

“interpreted” and could never be known by and in itself. Failure to recognize this fact amounts to our forgetfulness of the dialectical character of knowledge formation—that is, the complexity of our relation to the objective world—which is further complicated by the now reified structure of our conceptual apparatus. The recognition of the materiality of experience also discloses the fact that the act of interpreting or evaluating the world is conditioned by physiological or somatic factors:

What is the meaning of the act of evaluating itself? Does it point back or down to another, metaphysical world? . . . evaluation is an *exegesis*, a way of interpreting. The exegesis itself is a symptom of certain physiological conditions, likewise of a particular spiritual level of prevalent judgments: Who interprets?—Our affects (*WP* 254).

This passage corroborates Nietzsche’s claim that the formation of concepts through nerve stimuli has a physiological basis: the senses. The senses, however, do not function to capture the world as it is, but, rather, contribute to the interpretation of the world. This view is opposed to the metaphysical worldview which construes knowledge as the direct representation of the ontological structure of the world. In this specific sense, metaphysics resembles “transcendental” or “dogmatic” realism which considers rationality as having the capacity to overcome its limitations and, hence, is able to understand the world as it is. Nietzsche shares his skepticism towards transcendental realism with Kant and most post-Kantian thinkers, especially the early Romantics, including Hegel. Any ontological

discourse, for Nietzsche, is partly shaped by the limitations of the human intellect. Language, in this context, could be viewed as a way of overcoming our intellectual handicap; it is a process of making *sense* of naturally occurring phenomena which are otherwise unintelligible. However, this is not to say that language can paint an accurate picture of reality. Linguistic conceptualizations are, at best, mimetic devices we use to make sense of the world—they are, for Nietzsche, creative and necessary illusions. Nietzsche is critical of metaphysics because it generally shares with transcendental realism the dishonest illusion of an accurate representation of reality and by thwarting or falsifying the structure of reality, that is, by privileging the formal reified categories of conceptual language instead of the emphatic and material structure of language. It is not so much the use of categories or “fictions,” as Nietzsche describes them, such as “cause” and “effect,” that is the problem, but, rather, the reification of these categories which downplays their linguistic origin and socio-pragmatic purpose. Reification is also described as the enactment into law of fictional images (see *BGE* 21-22). The metaphysical emphasis on immediacy downplays the mediatory structure of conceptualization that Nietzsche is arguing in his early writings on language. The interpretative character of evaluation, described in *Beyond Good and Evil*, is none other than the metonymic, mediatory, or metaphorical character of language that his early writings seek to elucidate. For Nietzsche, metaphysics or any discourse that oversimplifies or reduces language into

conceptual or reified thinking spells the death of the figurative dimension of language. This also means the repression of the creative character of human experience, rendering thinking unresponsive to new possibilities. Nietzsche's critique exhibits an anxiety over this repression.

What Nietzsche ultimately seeks is a revival of the rhetorical force of language; such revival also entails, or perhaps requires, an overcoming of the metaphysical bias, that is, of reification. Such overcoming of metaphysics, of nihilism, presupposes a deeper sense of the nature of language. Nietzsche's approach to language is not only descriptive but, more importantly, qualitative. I use the word qualitative here to refer to Nietzsche's emphasis on the complex relation between language and knowledge formation. In contrast to the analytic emphasis on the formal or representational features of language, Nietzsche would stress the rhetorical, expressive, and poetic aspects of language. A metacritique of the purely conceptual use of language radicalizes our perspectives on metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. Philosophy, as mentioned in the previous chapter, is a way of thinking that does not only take issue with the function of language in general but, more importantly, it also takes issue with its very own language; this also means that philosophy's self-understanding of itself and its limitations should serve as its caveat, if it wishes to survive. Nietzsche's qualitative approach, therefore, highlights a crucial *performative* aspect of philosophical language—that is, of its very own self-reflexivity that lends

itself to the self-critique and, thus, self-understanding of philosophy. This is one sense of understanding how Nietzsche carries out an "immanent critique" of language. It is a "critique" of language because he offers his own analysis of language's relation to knowledge formation and, as such, also reveals philosophy's relation to its own language. In other words, a critique of language lends itself, in this very specific sense, as philosophical praxis.

Nietzsche's aphoristic style is a *conscious* exercise of philosophical praxis—to a certain extent, a continuation of the experimentation with the fragment, as well as other forms of literary genres, carried out by the German Romantics. Like the German Romantics and Gerber, Nietzsche deliberately goes beyond a common sense understanding of language and argues that the creative or artistic is a normative element of language; like Hamann and Humboldt, Nietzsche operatively mounts his critique by highlighting the normativity of the linguistic apparatus in writing and philosophizing; a gesture that does not end up in the fossilization of form and content or the equation of the two, that is to say, it does not result in the petrifying tendency of identity (it will be shown in the next chapter that Adorno makes a very similar move). Ultimately, for Nietzsche, the critique of language presupposes language in all its limitations and possibilities, for a withdrawal from the thrall of a facile outlook on language presupposes a

“cosmos of meanings,”⁹⁷ an intricately related network of symbolic and metaphorical references that conditions the critique in the first place. This is to say that language is the very space within which an immanent appraisal of language could be intuitively done. For Nietzsche, the self-critique of philosophy entails emphasizing philosophy’s indebtedness to language: that the language of philosophy is itself conceptual and, more importantly for Nietzsche, this conceptual language is by nature metaphorical. Jacques Derrida offers the following observation:

Nietzsche’s procedure (the generalization of metaphoricity by putting into *abyme* one determined metaphor) is possible only if one takes the risk of a continuity between the metaphor and the concept, as between animal and man, instinct and knowledge. In order not to wind up at an empiricist reduction of knowledge and a fantastic ideology of truth, one should surely substitute another articulation for the (maintained or erased) classical opposition of metaphor and concept. This new articulation, without importing all the metaphysics of the classical opposition, should also account for the specific divisions that epistemology cannot overlook, the divisions between what it calls metaphoric effects and scientific effects. The need for this new articulation has undoubtedly been called for by Nietzsche’s discourse. It will have to provoke a displacement and an entire reinscription of the values of science and truth, that is, of several others too.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Martin Seel uses the phrase “cosmos of meanings” to refer to a Nietzschean conception of the normative character of language. See *Aesthetics of Appearing*, trans. by John Farrell (California: Stanford University Press, 2005), 8-9.

⁹⁸ Jacques Derrida, “White Mythology,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 262-263.

Derrida is perhaps suggesting that philosophy is precisely the symbiotic relationship between figurative- and conceptual language. He describes Nietzsche's approach as instigating a new way of "articulating" this relationship; the articulation of such a relationship reduces philosophical language to neither the purely figurative nor the purely conceptual. As noted earlier, following Breazeale, the difference between the literal and the figurative is one of relative degree, for they both come from the same genealogical element, that is, experience. Ultimately, what this amounts to is an overcoming of the reificatory tendency of the metaphysical bias, which is precisely the sheer reduction of philosophical language to the purely conceptual, the purely literal. Such overcoming is the displacement of the well-guarded metaphysical valuations, especially the notion of truth. If we pursue Derrida's suggestion, then we will notice that philosophical discourse amounts to a circular balance between the figurative and the conceptual; but if we follow Nietzsche, alongside Derrida, the dialectical balance between the figurative and conceptual are enclosed within a bigger circle: language as metaphorical, mediated, aesthetic.

The foregoing reconstruction of Nietzsche's engagement with the nature of language in his early works provides a framework whereupon the metaphorical foundation of valuation can be appraised. What underlies this reconstruction is the relationship between figurative- and conceptual language. From "On Truth and Lies" we witnessed a *genealogical* account of

the *origin* of our notion of truth and its relation to knowledge. I agree with Wayne Klein that “the text should be considered as a means towards a revaluation of truth, not, as is too often assumed, as a way of rejecting or denying truth.”⁹⁹ Derrida’s observation that Nietzsche’s procedure displaces metaphysical valuations and reinscribes the valuations of science and philosophy, sans the metaphysical bias, is in line with Klein’s claim. One can say that “On Truth and Lies” does just this; a displacement and reinscription of the notion of truth. This implicit temperament in “On Truth and Lies” is corroborated by claims made by Nietzsche in his more mature works, specifically, *Twilight of the Idols*; as we shall see in the last section of this chapter, commentators, like Maudmarie Clark, are wrong to argue that Nietzsche underwent a radical shift in his account of truth.

If Derrida is not terribly wrong in claiming that Nietzsche’s style exemplifies the intertwining of the conceptual and figurative, then one should be able to exhibit this procedure, that is, the metaphorical function of philosophical writing. The new articulation of which Derrida speaks about is, I would argue, precisely the reinscription of metaphor in philosophy. Already at the very beginning of “On Truth and Lies,” Nietzsche already registers the subtle and tensional relation between the figurative- and the conceptual use of language:

⁹⁹ Klein, *Nietzsche and the Promise of Philosophy*, 62.

Once upon a time, in some out of the way corner of that universe which is dispersed into numberless twinkling solar systems, there was a star upon which clever beasts invented knowing. That was the most arrogant and mendacious minute of "world history," but nevertheless, it was only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths, the star cooled and congealed, and the clever beasts had to die (*TL I, 79*).

Beyond the fact that the passage is a pronouncement of a critical outlook on our well-kept epistemological assumptions, there is something more subtle going on in the text. Nietzsche further ridicules the primacy accorded to the human intellect over nature: "One might invent such a fable, and yet he still would not have adequately illustrated how miserable, how shadowy and transient, how aimless and arbitrary the human intellect looks within nature" (*TL I, 79*). Nietzsche does not hide the fact that his genealogical account is a "fable" or an "invention," to be more precise, a fable of an invention. The word "invent," thus, has two overlapping significations in the text which, interestingly, informs the form and content of the text. The essay is, firstly, a creative invention of the author (Nietzsche) which is, secondly, about another invention, namely, the invention of knowledge. Hence, the opening of the essay is complex inasmuch as it attempts to get across several levels of meaning. What Nietzsche is doing, to use Derrida's words, is articulating the continuity between concept and metaphor. To put it another way, Nietzsche is himself using metaphorical images (e.g., the solar system and the clever beast) in order not only to assert

an epistemological observation, but also to register the unstable and mediated structure of writing. Following Derrida, I would like to maintain that Nietzsche's text carries out the figurative-conceptual circle that is at the heart of philosophical discourse. The figurative-conceptual polarity is blurred out. In this way, the text is itself a testament of the self-reflexivity of language via the process of writing and reading.

But what is the importance of reinscribing metaphor in philosophical discourse? We could gain an appreciation of the recovery of metaphor by invoking Nietzsche's critique of the dissimulative tendency of conceptual thinking. What this dissimulation ultimately entails, for Nietzsche, is the forgetfulness of the "artistic" means by which we construct our conceptualizations of the world. He asserts:

Only by forgetting this primitive world of metaphor can one live with any repose, security, and consistency: only by means of the petrification and coagulation of a mass of images which originally streamed from the primal faculty of human imagination like a fiery liquid, only in the invincible faith that *this sun, this window, this table* is a truth in itself, in short, only by forgetting that he himself is an *artistically creating* subject, does man live with any repose, security, and consistency (TL I, 86).

What is forgotten is not simply the linguistic function of metaphor (that metaphor is the indirect representation of the world and, thus, does not reflect the ultimate and final truth) but the metaphorical origin of all our valuations—that all conceptualizations of the world (knowledge) are *created* and not discovered. The forgetfulness of metaphor also means the

forgetfulness of the social basis of this *artistic creation*. What Nietzsche instigates is, I argue, a shift from an essentialist epistemology to a type of epistemology that is more sensitive to the aesthetic character of human experience. Knowledge is not based on transcendent and immutable truths, but, rather, on socially regulated valuations: "For so far we have heard only of the duty which society imposes in order to exist" (*TL* I, 84). I further argue that this shift is a response to the problem of reification that such forgetfulness effectuates. Hence, the reinscription of metaphor *redeems* our "aesthetic" relation with the objects of the world. The aesthetic dimension of Nietzsche's epistemology maintains that valuations are created out the metaphoricity of language and that it is this very creation of values, metaphysical or otherwise, from the standpoint of the economy of meaning that the social sphere within which we live is produced. It is only from this standpoint that philosophical discourse is possible.

Inasmuch as the language of philosophy is informed by the economy or constellation of metaphorical tropes, images, symbolisms, then it is situated within the social sphere. What this means is that despite the fact that ordinary language communication can be described as bland, pragmatic, and instrumentalist, Nietzsche considered them metaphorical in the sense that they are "creative" ways of dealing with our day-to-day transactions. It should be noted, however, that it is not part of ordinary language communication's agenda to self-reflectively understand itself as such. The

recovery of philosophy's relation to the aesthetic—or put another way, the recovery of reason's relation to aesthetics—redeems the receptive and creative element of philosophical thinking. The recovery of the aesthetic also entails, for philosophy, the overcoming of metaphysical obsession, that is to say, the overcoming of the purely conceptual; which, of course, means emancipation from the dissimulative influence of repose, security, and consistency promised by metaphysics. While this break from metaphysics could be seen as an unsettling break from constitutive meaning, which implies the untenability of meaning or value in our truth claims, it should be pointed out that Nietzsche is not proposing a total abandonment of the possibility of interpretation; as a matter of fact, the importance of interpretation has been pointed out above as having a central role in Nietzsche's genealogical account of value judgments. What the break from metaphysics opens up, and which has direct implications for philosophy, is the revaluation of our value judgments, a reexamination of our overconfidence in the certitude of knowledge. Nietzsche exposes the ultimate struggle of philosophy: its relation to the aesthetic. Nietzsche, however, reinscribes this struggle as philosophy's new imperative—the self-examination of its language. When Nietzsche proclaims, “We now oppose knowledge with art” (*TP* 43), he is not calling for the abandonment of knowledge, but, rather, the “Mastery of the knowledge drive! Strengthening of the moral and aesthetic instincts!” (*TP* 43). Nietzsche hopes, therefore, for

philosophy's coming to terms with the aesthetic, that is say, the creative potential of philosophy's very own language. Such potential is only tenable if philosophy, in the first place, admits its very own limitations. It is only in this way can philosophy talk or *say* something about the world in *different* ways.

Chapter Three: Adorno's Revaluation of the Language of Philosophy

My recount of Nietzsche's proposal of a reinscription of the metaphorical structure of language prefigures the present chapter in more ways than one. Like Nietzsche, Adorno's preoccupation with language is gleaned from the context of his theory of knowledge, particularly, his critique of identity thinking. Both Nietzsche and Adorno tackle the problem of conceptual reification genealogically, that is, they both trace conceptual reification via an analysis of the structure of language. My aim in this chapter is to argue that Adorno's engagement with the nature of language is informed by an implicit attempt at a revaluation of the language of philosophy, a revaluation that has significant consequences for a global understanding of how we conceive the world of objects, in general, and how philosophy's configurative use of concepts could be seen as a way of disclosing uncharted possibilities, in particular.

The three sections of the chapter will permit me to narrate this story. In the first section, I locate Adorno's theory of language within the context of the so-called "linguistic turn" in critical theory. I specifically argue that such linguistic turn is already found in Adorno's early writings on philosophy and language, as opposed to the conventional view that Jürgen Habermas' theory of communication marks a radical shift from early critical theory. At best, what Habermas offers is merely a shift in emphasis and not a total circumvention of Adorno's earlier project and, at its worst, the Habermasian

position represses the most important aspects of Adorno's work—for instance, the downplaying of the role of mimetic language which unfortunately ignores the role of "nature" in knowledge formation. The second section will be a reconstruction of Adorno's philosophy of language which is itself an analysis of the relationship between language and philosophy. Like Nietzsche, Adorno exposes the Janus face of language, that is, its capacity to either "empower" or "imprison" thinking. For Adorno, the critical examination of the language of philosophy should be construed as an immanent feature of philosophy if philosophy is to survive. Such immanent critique reveals not only the genealogical element of conceptual reification, but also reminds philosophy of its very own self-understanding and receptivity to the non-identical. The last section of this chapter deals with the notion of "configurative language," which could be interpreted as an Adornoian version of the reinscription of metaphor into conceptual language. Philosophy is able to redeem itself from conceptual reification by being more receptive to configurative language, that is, its ability to rethink the non-identical by constantly reconfiguring the constellation of its concepts in order not to get fixated and to be able to live up to its imperative of accommodating new possibilities. Once more, Nietzsche and Adorno converge inasmuch as they both propose philosophy's reorientation to the "aesthetic" dimension of experience, which is more receptive to alternative forms of expression, different ways of saying or describing things.

A. The Linguistic Turn in Critical Theory

Very much like Nietzsche, one of his key predecessors, Adorno did not leave us with an explicitly systematic study of language. However, and again like Nietzsche, a philosophical theory of language is implicitly interwoven in Adorno's writings. This is the case despite the fact that the latter emphatically insists in his "Theses on the Language of the Philosopher" that the key in understanding the presuppositions of philosophy, inasmuch as philosophy is indebted to language, is by a reassessment of the role of language in the enterprise of philosophy. While there is evidently a relatively rich body of literature on Adorno's engagement with language,¹⁰⁰ it is still true that his reception is largely that of the neo-Marxist persuasion which focuses on his critique of capitalist society and debated within the context of the theory-praxis relation. While the reading of Adorno offered in this thesis is not inimical to the neo-Marxist appropriation, it is not farfetched to say that the neo-Marxist readings often ignore certain crucial aspects of his philosophy, especially his complex

¹⁰⁰ Notable examples are the following: Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute* (New York: The Free Press, 1979); Frederic Jameson, *Late Marxism: Adorno, or, the Persistence of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 1996); Peter Uwe Hohendahl, *Prismatic Thought: Theodor Adorno* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995); Shierry Weber Nicholsen, *Exact Imagination, Late Work: On Adorno's Aesthetics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1997); Albrecht Wellmer, *Endgames: The Irreconcilable Nature of Modernity: Essays and Lectures*, trans. by David Midgley (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998), in particular 239-262; Martin Morris, *Rethinking the Communicative Turn: Adorno, Habermas, and the Problem of Communicative Freedom* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001); Samir Gandesha, "The 'Aesthetic Dignity of Words': Adorno's Philosophy of Language," in *New German Critique*, 97 (Winter 2006), 137-158; and the collection of essays put together by Donald A. Burke et al. eds., *Adorno and the Need in Thinking: New Critical Essays* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

epistemology and his contributions to the philosophy of language. As such, it is not surprising that Jürgen Habermas takes all the credit for the so-called "linguistic turn" in critical theory. It is well known that Habermas is partly responsible for the current reception of critical theory, in general, and the appropriation of Adorno's work, in particular.¹⁰¹ This reception is largely informed by Habermas' criticism of the first generation proponents of the Frankfurt School, especially the Institute's front men, Max Horkheimer and Adorno, a criticism that resulted in the recasting of critical theory.¹⁰² Habermas reproaches Horkheimer and Adorno for ending in an irrecoverable stalemate in the prospects of critical theory. According to Habermas, "the program of early critical theory foundered not on this or that contingent circumstance, but from the exhaustion of the paradigm of the

¹⁰¹ David Held mentions a couple of unfortunate consequences of the over-valorized emphasis on Habermas: 1) the failure of current literature to explicate the "differences in scope of the various types of critical theory" and 2) it is ignored that some of the writings of the Frankfurt School (Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse) "offer alternative positions to those defended by Habermas." Taking these unfortunate turnouts into consideration, we are able to question the general view that Habermas represents the "pinnacle of critical theory." See *Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 379.

¹⁰² Honneth critically examines this theoretical shift in his "From Adorno to Habermas: On the Transformation of Critical Social Theory," in *The Fragmented World of the Social: Essays in Social and Political Philosophy*, 92-93. Herbert Schädelbach also gives us a critical assessment of Habermas' *The Theory of Communicative Action*, taking issue on whether Habermas' project furthers critical theory or not. See "The Transformation of Critical Theory," in *Communicative Action: Essays on Jürgen Habermas's The Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. by Jeremy Gaines and Doris L. Jones (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 7-22. Meanwhile, Albrecht Wellmer defends Habermas' reformulation of the conception of historical materialism via a deliberate reconstitution of reason through linguistic organization, which further entails an overcoming of the alleged vicious circle created by the antinomies of early Marxism and the presuppositions of the Frankfurt School. See "Communications and Emancipation: Reflections on the Linguistic Turn in Critical Theory," in *On Critical Theory*, ed. by John O'Neill (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1977), 231-263.

philosophy of consciousness.”¹⁰³ The shift from the hard interdisciplinary materialism of the original Institute for Social Research in the 1930s to the immanent critique of instrumental reason instigated by Horkheimer and Adorno in the 1940s marked, for Habermas, the interruption of a more sustainable critical theory of society. Since, in the mind of Habermas, this shift led the original interdisciplinary materialist approach to an impasse, he argues that the only way to redeem critical theory is by another paradigm shift, i.e., the shift to the “theory of communication.”¹⁰⁴ By refocusing critical theory to the study of the “communicative” domain of language, Habermas abandons the “mimetic” character of language, which Adorno claimed to be the very core feature of language. To redeem critical theory from what Habermas thinks as the impasse reached by the exhaustion of the philosophy of consciousness, he proposes a redefinition of the normative critique of society, that is, by demonstrating the pragmatic and linguistic aspects of social relations. Instead of focusing on the subject-object relation (philosophy of consciousness), that is to say, the relation between the knower and the thing known, Habermas prioritizes intersubjective human relations made possible by rational communication, i.e., language. This theory of communication sets out to describe the immanent or the concrete structure

¹⁰³ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, Volume One, trans. by Thomas McCarthy (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 386.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

of social interactions—a phenomenon opposed to the symbolic realm mediated by the mimetic function language—while, at the same time, it also maintains that immanent intersubjective communication is governed by a transcendental speech situation.¹⁰⁵ For Habermas, the obscurity of Adorno's notion of mimesis, along with a theory of negativity, militates against the promise of a critical theory of society and causes the latter's theory of language to backfire, since the “negativity” of a mimetic relation between subject and object does not provide a sympathetic account of reason, on the one hand, and results in a self-contradiction, on the other, since even negative dialectics presupposes a theoretical discussion of the subject-object relation. Habermas abandons the emphasis on mimesis and shifts his emphasis on a counterfactual normative presupposition, the “ideal speech situation,” wherein it is assumed that the other is a rational communicative agent that could share a common understanding of the issue at hand, making more plausible the rational coordination of action in response to the issue. Since Habermas' assumed normative standpoint presupposes an abandonment of the subject-object relation, his model of communication cannot account for or accommodate non-rational or non-human others. We shall see in Chapter Eight of this study that abandoning the subject-object

¹⁰⁵ For a comprehensive account of the basic tenets of Habermas' critical theory and his relation to the first generation members of the Frankfurt School see Held, *op cit.*, 249-400; for a succinct discussion of Habermas' theory of communicative action see Kenneth Baynes, “The transcendental turn: Habermas's ‘Kantian Pragmatism’,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 194-218; and for a focused discussion of the Adorno-Habermas debate, see Morris, *op cit.*, especially 95-191.

relation runs the risk of a reductive model of language that is only able to account for intersubjective communication, while ignoring the fact that human existence goes beyond the intersubjective sphere and involves a broader sphere we call the “world.” It is worthwhile to flag at this juncture that Adorno’s revisionist account of the subject-object relation takes into consideration not only the communicative sphere, but also the world of non-communicative objects.

Habermas’ characterization of Adorno’s project is, to say the least, unfair. While I take issue with the former’s claim that Adorno’s work is representative of the philosophy of consciousness, it is perhaps best to reconstruct Adorno’s philosophy of language in order to find out why the Habermasian interpretation is questionable. Albeit nuanced, Adorno’s insights on language remain implicit. Albrecht Wellmer convincingly notes:

. . . we might speak of an implicit language philosophy or theory of rationality in Adorno. But whatever we decide to call it, I doubt whether the reformulation of Critical Theory in terms of language pragmatics is sufficient to supersede this implicit philosophy of Adorno’s.¹⁰⁶

This perhaps means two things: 1) that Habermas’ self-proclaimed linguistic turn in critical theory does not acknowledge its indebtedness to Adorno; and 2) that Habermas’ attempt at circumventing first generation critical theory fails precisely because his purported linguistic turn could be

¹⁰⁶ Albrecht Weller, *Endgames: The Irreconcilable Nature of Modernity: Essays and Lectures*, 259.

seen as a continuation rather than a total break from linguistic issues already dealt with by Adorno. It could be said, however, that it was necessary for Habermas to skirt around a notion of mimesis because such notion complicates a supposedly amenable theory of rational communication. While Habermas considers the mimetic character of language as a hindrance to communication and, hence, he ends up juxtaposing the two as if they were binary opposites, the same could not be said of Adorno. Adorno's emphasis on the mimetic character of language does not aim at abandoning the possibility of rational communication but, rather, challenges and complicates it. Hence, it is misleading to conclude, like Habermas does, that Adorno completely abandons a theory of rationality; however, his insights about communicative rationality are precipitated by his general theory of language which, as Wellmer observes, remains a "buried treasure"¹⁰⁷ in Adorno's oeuvre. While Habermas supposes that Adorno's lack of emphasis on communicative rationality is an oversight on the part of the latter, a closer inspection of Adorno's philosophy of language would, however, reveal that there is a more serious oversight, to say the least, on the part of Habermas because he is too quick to ignore the significance of Adorno's predisposition towards a critique of how thought is arrested by our use of language. In other words, what Adorno is proposing is very similar to Nietzsche's proposal intimated in the previous chapter: that the best possible way for

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 261.

philosophy to understand the nature of conceptual reification is via a serious scrutiny of how we use language and how it functions in knowledge formation. More specifically, for Adorno, we could trace the roots of “identity thinking” not in language per se, but in the way we use language to create an acceptable or controllable picture of the world. While Habermas’ shift to communicative theory downplays the role played by an analysis of representation, Adorno situates a theory of representation at the center of his critique of conceptual language. This strategy problematizes not only communicative rationality but, ultimately, the language of philosophy as well.

In recent years, there has been another paradigm shift in critical theory, i.e., the shift from communicative theory to the “theory of recognition” championed by Axel Honneth, a former student of Habermas. The theory of recognition can be roughly described as the attempt to situate “social theory on the very level of the immanent normativity of social action and interaction.”¹⁰⁸ Honneth follows the logic of Habermas’ recasting of Frankfurt School critical theory by going beyond the subject-object line and emphasizing the “intersubjective” and “communicative” aspects of social reproduction. Honneth goes beyond Habermas, however, by rejecting the “pragmatic-linguistic” dimension of communicative theory, as the former

¹⁰⁸ Jean-Philippe Deranty, “Injustice, Violence and Social Struggle: The Critical Potential of Axel Honneth’s Theory of Recognition,” in *Critical Horizons*, 5 (2004), 298.

asserts that such pragmatic interpretation of communication results in the “reified distinction between material and social reproduction.” Honneth insists on the normative features of recognition as transcendental conditions for social interaction; the undermining of these factors precipitates the emergence of individual and social pathologies.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, for a different reason from that of Habermas, Honneth is critical of Adorno for the latter's failure to emphasize the role of social agents as normative participants in the struggle for recognition. Nevertheless, there has been quite recently a change in the way Honneth reads the first generation Frankfurt School, especially the works of Adorno. In more recent essays, his treatment of Adorno has been more or less sympathetic.¹¹⁰ In his rereading of Adorno, however, Honneth neither focuses on Adorno's theory of language nor does he aim to rehabilitate the subject-object relation, but, rather, he presents a revisionist reading of Adorno, particularly the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which aims to defend a “world disclosive” model of critique. This point will be elaborated in Chapter Six. Suffice it to say for now that Honneth's more sympathetic reading, in contradistinction to Habermas, is in a better position to reconsider the neglected, yet very crucial, aspects of Adorno's

¹⁰⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 299-302.

¹¹⁰ See, for example, the collection of essays by Honneth in the following volumes: *The Fragmented World of the Social: Essays in Social and Political Philosophy* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995); *Disrespect: The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007); and *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

epistemology and theory of language; in particular, the disclosive aspect of Adorno's revaluation of the language of philosophy.

B. Language and the Immanent Critique of Philosophy

Adorno's thoughts on language are thematically wide-ranging, which contributes to the difficulty of offering a definitive and succinct presentation that could be called a "philosophy of language." My aim, however, is not to present a definitive reconstruction of Adorno's reflections on language, but it is necessary to be succinct for the purposes of this thesis. My reconstruction will, therefore, be guided by one very general theme, which I deem to be the most important aspect of Adorno's critique of language: the relationship between language and philosophy.

This reconstruction is based on the following early essays of Adorno: "Theses on the Language of the Philosopher," "The Actuality of Philosophy," and "Why still Philosophy." The titles of these early essays are, themselves, decisive because they focus precisely on the aforementioned guiding theme: language's relation to philosophy. Language is not merely a component of thought, but is something that is inextricably related to how thinking functions. Language is not only a reflection or analogue of thought, but essentially partly determines how we *process* our claims about the world. By *process* here I am referring to the means by which we negotiate with "objective" reality and, concomitantly, how these means of negotiation (rational communication being one) are an apparatus that pathologically

fulfills our compulsion towards identity thinking—a process of reified thought in modern capitalist societies, whereby objects and humans are subsumed under abstract concepts, undermining individuality and genuine human interaction. In other words, very similar to Nietzsche's position, Adorno views the language-thought process as largely contributing to the process of reification. Adorno is specifically attentive to the reificatory tendency of language. It must be said, however, that he does not criticize language to simply leave it in the lurch, again a very Nietzschean gesture. Rather, Adorno's observations on language are set out, like Nietzsche, to demonstrate the Janus face of language: the "imprisonment-empowerment" character of language use. As will become evident later, Adorno's analysis has consequences for philosophy, particularly, the self-understanding of philosophy.

Following Wellmer's lead, reconstructing a philosophy of language from the aforementioned essays will aid in digging up Adorno's hidden treasure: a critical philosophy of language that informs his works at a subterranean level and, as such, functions as an immanent critique of philosophy itself. Naturally, this reconstruction attempts to set off the Habermasian position, yet again it is not necessarily an opposition in diametrical terms. However, it will be presented as a counterclaim against Habermas' misleading characterization of Adorno's philosophy as a representative of the philosophy of consciousness. Being an early piece of

work, the “Theses on the Language of the Philosopher” plays a very seminal role in the formulation of Adorno’s more mature writings. Similar to Nietzsche, Adorno’s early musings on language profoundly shaped his general conception, critique, and reconceptualization of ontology and epistemology. At the end of this section, it should be clearer why, for Adorno, philosophy should take its own language seriously. Philosophy’s awareness of its inextricable relation to language is in itself a form of philosophical praxis which is at the core of the “normativity of the new” proposed by Kompridis.

The problem of modernity is an intricately complex subject matter and, as such, spawns a method of analysis that is even more complicated. Adorno, however, finds a focal point in his critique of modernity by making language his point of departure. Again to rehearse Adorno’s claim: “All philosophical critique is today possible as the critique of language” (*TLP* 9). We should follow Adorno in endorsing this statement and we should make it the guiding spirit of our query how are language and philosophy related? Already in this statement is a strong indication that Adorno took the problem of language seriously and that this seriousness extends towards his very own conception of a philosophy oriented in the normativity of the new. A key to understanding the language-philosophy relation is to first unlock Adorno’s cryptic statement. Samir Gandesha observes that one possible explanation is by looking at Adorno’s connection with Viennese modernism,

specifically Adorno's relation to the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein.¹¹¹

Gandesha notes:

Adorno's own understanding of philosophy could be seen . . . as motivated by something like the attack in the *Tractatus* on how, just as clothes disguise the body, "language disguises the thought" that "all philosophy is critique of language" . . . Adorno's statement could be taken as aiming, in an antithetical way, at a conception of critique as a form of "*Destruktion*," not of the history of Being per se but rather as the attempt to think "conceptually beyond the concept."¹¹²

Indeed, in "Actuality of Philosophy," Adorno is not optimistic about the classical philosophical presupposition "that the power of thought is sufficient to grasp the totality of the real" (AR 24). He surmises that if philosophy continues to be the handmaiden of this rationalist prejudice, then philosophy, he writes, "only veils reality and eternalizes its present condition" (AR 24) because it is illusory to presume the possibility of grasping the essence of reality in a *purist* manner in a situation where "the order and form" of reality "suppresses every claim to reason" (AR 24). Adorno further gives us an example of a style of philosophizing which, despite its self-proclaimed radical deconstruction of the history of metaphysics, remains within the purist tradition:

¹¹¹ See Gandesha, "The 'Aesthetic Dignity of Words': Adorno's Philosophy of Language," 140. Moreover, Wellmer provides us with a riveting comparison between the philosophical attitudes of Wittgenstein and Adorno in "Ludwig Wittgenstein: On the Difficulties of Receiving His Philosophy and Its Relation to the Philosophy of Adorno," in *Endgames*, 239-249.

¹¹² Gandesha, "The 'Aesthetic Dignity of Words': Adorno's Philosophy of Language," 140.

. . . the question of being (*Sein*) itself . . . assumes as the possibility of its answer that being itself is appropriate to thought and available to it, that the idea of existing being (*das Seienden*) can be examined. . . . The idea of being had become powerless in philosophy; it is nothing more than an empty form-principle whose archaic dignity helps to cover any content whatsoever (AR 24-25).

It is obvious from the quotation that Adorno is referring specifically to Heidegger and his relentless quest for the meaning of Being. Adorno observes that Heidegger presupposes the concept of Being as a necessary condition for the proper understanding of reality. This is obviously an idiosyncratic reading of Heidegger, and Adorno seems at times readily dismissive of Heidegger. Nevertheless, what Adorno wishes to emphasize is the fact that the “concept of Being” is indeed merely a “concept,” and as such is in some way inert, even dead. Therefore, for Adorno, the concept of Being is nothing more than a philosophical scaffolding, allegedly circumventing former idealist systems via *phenomenological* means, that denies the function (consciously or not) of preempting and subsuming the actuality of the real. Adorno continues,

The fullness of the real, as totality, does not let itself be subsumed under the idea of Being which might allocate meaning to it; nor can the idea of existing being be built up out of elements of reality. It [the idea of being] is lost for philosophy, and thereby its claim to the totality of the real is struck at its source (AR 25).

Adorno tries to show how fundamental ontology fails on its very own

terms,¹¹³ for the "binding order of being" is nothing more than the same "*autonome ratio*" of the idealists clothed in "trans-subjective" language (AR 26). This, Adorno laments, is "nothing more than a poor ornamental cover for faulty thinking" (AR 30) which would make the "liquidation of philosophy" into separate sciences sound like a more favorable development. It could, of course, be debated whether Adorno got Heidegger right; since Heidegger is not simply concerned with Being per se, but, rather, with the ontological background that makes the intelligibility of a world of equipmental items (*Zuhandene*) possible. Regardless of the imprecision of Adorno's critique of Heidegger, it is perhaps safe to assume that Adorno's critique is actually directed towards idealist philosophy and, rightly or wrongly, he interprets the philosophical discourse of Being as a representative of the idealist stance.¹¹⁴ It is important to note that Adorno

¹¹³ Adorno writes: "The claim to totality made by thought is thrown back upon thought itself, and it is finally shattered there too" (AR 28).

¹¹⁴ Jarvis writes on the Adorno-Heidegger relation: "Adorno's intense antipathy towards Heidegger is prompted in part by his awareness of deep convergences between his thought and Heidegger's. Each wishes to insist on the temporal-historical character of truth without taking this as an excuse for relativism; each resists reducing philosophy either to a method or to a doctrine. Most importantly, each is deeply concerned with a critique or questioning of modernity—as especially of the conversion of production into an absolute—without offering any simple return to tradition. Yet these convergences are accompanied by ineradicable political differences." *Adorno: A Critical Introduction*, 199. Jarvis is, of course, referring to Heidegger's involvement with the National Socialists and Adorno's ethical commitment to upbraid a phenomenology that, he assumes, has tacitly contributed to, or at least consented to, the totalitarian worldview that so characterized the Nazi regime. For recent studies on the Adorno-Nietzsche relation, see Alexander Garcia Düttmann, *The Memory of Thought: An Essay on Heidegger and Adorno*, trans. by Nicholas Walker (London: Continuum, 2002) and Iain Macdonald and Krzysztof Ziarek eds., *Adorno and Heidegger: Philosophical Questions* (California: Stanford University Press, 2008).

does not advocate the wholesale liquidation of philosophy, but rather the liquidation of a particular type or attitude of philosophizing. He argues that there is still a fundamental difference between philosophy and the natural sciences with regard to the manner by which each interprets reality.

Philosophy distinguishes itself from science not by a higher level of generality, as the banal view still today assumes, nor through the abstractness of its categories nor through the nature of its materials. The central difference lies far more in that the separate sciences accept their findings, at least their final and deepest findings, as indestructible and static, whereas philosophy perceives the first findings which it lights upon as a sign that needs unriddling. Plainly put: the idea of science (*Wissenschaft*) is research; that of philosophy is interpretation (AR 30-31).

“Interpretation,” in this light, could also mean the mimetic character of philosophical language. This notion of philosophy’s main task as “interpretation” is compatible with Nietzsche’s metaphorical view of knowledge formation and valuation. Interpretation is central to philosophy because we do not have direct access to the external world of objects save our mediatory, metaphorical linguistic apparatus. Within the context of mimesis, interpretation is philosophy’s receptivity to the non-identical structure of reality. However, Adorno thinks that philosophy, because of its compulsion towards objective truth and its desire to resemble the natural sciences, is oblivious of the function of interpretation; as such, philosophy’s interpretive or mimetic receptivity has fallen into disrepute. Adorno is nevertheless also critical of the positivistic approach of the so-called analytic

philosophers who, in their attempt to circumvent the meaninglessness of traditional metaphysics and epistemology (and here Adorno is referring to the tradition inaugurated by the Vienna Circle otherwise known as the Logical Positivists), err by taking as their "standard of truth the contingently given division of labor, that between the sciences and social praxis . . . and allows no theory that could reveal the division of labor to be itself derivative and mediated and thus strip it of its false authority" (CM 10). The representatives of logical positivism, Adorno observes, consider this philosophical line of thinking to be "the most rigorous faculty of enlightenment, adequate to the so-called technical-scientific age," and far superior to ways of thinking which are deemed "metaphysical" or "mythological" (CM 8). Moreover, Adorno mockingly points out, the "fanatics of logical tidiness" in their unwavering support for logical positivism seem to be oblivious to the "mechanism for its own self-legitimation," that is to say, the circularity of philosophy "equating itself with what should in fact first be illuminated by philosophy" (CM 10). Intellectual tyranny in our day, according to Adorno, is championed by two prevailing philosophical tendencies: one is "the ontological intimidation not to think anything that is not pure" and the other is "the scientific intimidation not to think anything that is not 'connected' to the corpus of findings recognized as scientifically valid" (CM 13). The fear that these two types of intellectual tyranny breed among us prohibits us from thinking

beyond the frameworks of sheer *purity* and/or absolute *logic*. Phenomenologists and logical positivists alike, according to Adorno, ignore the “primacy of organized method” and, as a result, end up in conceptual “fetishes” or “homemade concepts instead of their longed-for things” (CM 13). What this means for Adorno is the apparent demise of philosophy because it entails the obsolescence of philosophical “self-reflection.” Adorno intimates that, “Thought has been intimidated and no longer dares raise itself, not even in fundamental ontology’s devotional submissiveness to Being” (CM 15). But what is it exactly that these so called “tyrannical” movements fail to reflect upon? Given that the notions of purity and logical necessity are still grounded in an obsessive compulsion towards “truth,” Adorno claims that there is a failure in these movements to reflect on the “untruth” of the totality that they purport to demystify. Moreover, the blinding arrogance of philosophy prohibits it from recognizing the “untruth” of its very own locutions. Adorno continues in *Why Still Philosophy*:

. . . philosophy must come to know, without mitigation, why the world—which could be paradise here and now—can become hell itself tomorrow. Such knowledge would indeed truly be philosophy. It would be anachronistic to abolish it for the sake of a praxis that at this historical moment would inevitably eternalize precisely the present state of the world, the very critique of which is the concern of philosophy. Praxis whose purpose is to produce a rational and politically mature humanity, remains under the spell of disaster unless it has a theory that can think the totality in its untruth (CM 14).

Here Adorno wishes to point at the dialectical relation between

philosophy and the milieu within which it is suppose to operate. It does seem that he wants to highlight the irony that, despite the phenomenologists' musings on historicity, and the sheer empiricism of the logical positivists, these championing trends are in bad faith since they remain insulated within their very own claims to philosophical truth—in other words, they are not sensitive to the profound dialectical influence of historico-material conditions on thought and they do not factor in normative societal structures that determine thinking, e.g., the normativity of the philosophical tradition. Obviously, Adorno is arguing here that “historical critique” and “immanent critique” are wanting in these movements. From this, Adorno pushes for a revaluation of the philosophic sensibility by redeeming philosophy from philosophy itself. A new philosophic sensibility, Adorno urges, “should not be a warned-over idealism but rather must incorporate societal and political reality and its dynamic” (CM 14). It is clear that such a philosophy resists the gratuitous conceit of closed philosophical systems that force reality to conform to homemade conceptual categories, categories that end up deforming, or “falsifying” as Nietzsche puts it, rather than disclosing the real, and most of the time wrong, state of things. Adorno envisions a type of

. . . thinking that has no mental sanctuary, no illusion of an inner realm, and that acknowledges its lack of function and power can perhaps catch a glimpse of an order of the possible and the nonexistent, where human beings and things each would be in their rightful place (CM 15).

This is the new philosophic sensibility that Adorno envisions. It is a type of thinking that does not assume its own legitimation, that is to say, its own “self-justification by self-positing” (CM 15); it should acknowledge its uselessness and untruth amidst the fast changing world, thereby opening itself to *new* forms of framing the world, while, at the same time, adamantly conscious of the temporary nature of conceptual frameworks. This “powerlessness” of philosophy—its *negativity*—should serve as a “corrective” to its very own inherited means of self-justification, its own illusion of royalty, the idea of *philosophia perennis*. Adorno notes, however, that even before the emergence of Heideggerian ontology and logical positivism, the classical conception of philosophy as first philosophy has already been questioned and put into proper perspective by Hegel: “philosophy is its own time comprehended in thought” (CM 15). This definition of philosophy, Adorno adds, has gained “insight into the temporal nucleus of truth” and shows how philosophy is a kind of reflection of totality which is only possible if such thinking expresses “its own stage of consciousness as a necessary aspect of totality, at the same time also expressed the totality” (CM 16). What this means is that thinking can only be earnest when it is conscious of its very own rootedness in its own self-referentiality, that is, its own elliptical nature. This further entails the self-consciousness of a kind of thinking that acknowledges its own “untruth,”

that this untruth or incompleteness is part of the expression of a totality. Adorno maintains that a new type of philosophy should advance from the bad faith of closed systems (Hegel's included) by reflecting on the immanent nature of its archaic categories and by incorporating an awareness of its perpetual incompleteness, thereby blowing up the sanctuary of identity thinking and puncturing the bubble of the language of fundamental ontology. As such, philosophy opens itself to the possibility of non-identity thinking or the thinking of difference.¹¹⁵ Ultimately, this shift from close thinking to open thinking entails a prognosis and revaluation of philosophical language.

The revaluation of the language of philosophy entails, a la Heidegger and Derrida, a "*Destruction*," as Gandesha points out, of the history of Western philosophy.¹¹⁶ Specifically for Adorno this means the

¹¹⁵ Adorno notes: "When today's philosophical archaism evades this requirement, which it surely perceives, by offering ancient truth as an alibi, and abuses progress, which it merely prevents by pretending to have already overcome it, then these are all just so many excuses. No dialectic of progress suffices to legitimate an intellectual condition that believes itself safe and sound only because its corner has not been infiltrated by the deployment of objectivity, with which even the spiritual condition itself is intertwined and which ensures that all appeals to what is safe and sound immediately reinforce the calamity. The self-righteous profundity that treats the progressive consciousness *en cannaille* is flat. Reflections extending beyond the magical incantations of the ontologists as well as beyond the *vérités de faits* of the positivists are not trendy stupidities, as the ideology of the yellowed lampoons would have it, rather they are motivated by those very facts of the matter that ontologists as well as positivists pretend are the only things worthy of regard" (CM 16).

¹¹⁶ The idea that Adorno is a proto-deconstructionist is not such an outlandish view. There are a number of commentators who support this claim. See, for example, Martin Jay, *Adorno* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984); Christoph Menke, *The Sovereignty of Art: Aesthetic Negativity in Adorno and Derrida*, trans. by Neil Solomon

deconstruction of the language of Western philosophy. In stark contrast to the archaic concern of traditional philosophy from Plato to Hegel—the overvalorization of the concept or, in one word, idealism—Adorno outlines in *Negative Dialectics* what he thinks as the immanent concern of philosophy today: the overcoming of idealism. This is a paradoxical challenge for philosophy, since it is itself entangled within the contradictoriness of its tradition, that is, of its own language.

The work of philosophical self-reflection consists in unraveling that paradox. . . . Though doubtful as ever, a confidence that philosophy can make it after all—that the concept can transcend the concept, the preparatory and concluding element, and can thus reach the nonconceptual—is one of philosophy’s inalienable features and part of the naïveté that ails it (*ND* 7).

There is a tension between philosophy’s use of concepts and the nature of concepts itself. The “naïveté that ails” philosophy consists partly in its obsession with the *idea*, the very motivation of conceptual thinking, and partly in its obliviousness to the arbitrary and reifying nature of concepts. Ever since the Ancient Greeks broke away from mythical language and invented the notion that wisdom is the knowledge of first principles, philosophy’s struggle, as we observe its history, has been the preservation of

(Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1999); Jean-Philippe Deranty, “Adorno’s Other Son: Derrida and the Future of Critical Theory,” in *Social Semiotics*, 16:3 (September 2006), 421-433; and Samir Gandesha, “The ‘Aesthetic Dignity of Words’: Adorno’s Philosophy of Language,” 140-141. Moreover, Gandesha also discusses the relation of Adorno’s proto-deconstructionism to Heidegger, a relationship characterized by a “strange proximity” and “fundamental distance.” See “Leaving Home: On Adorno and Heidegger,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 101-128.

this archaic assumption—it desperately insulates itself from the dynamism of objective or material reality while, *nolens volens*, still dialectically determined by such reality. At the same time, the cognition or apprehension of such material reality depends on the employment of concepts while perpetually *escaping* these concepts. The only redemption available for philosophy, according to Adorno, is the “disenchantment of the concept.”

He writes:

. . . all concepts, even philosophical ones, refer to nonconceptualities, because concepts on their part are moments of the reality that requires their formation, primarily for the control of nature. What conceptualization appears to be from within, to one engaged in it—the predominance of its sphere, without which nothing is known—must not be mistaken for what it is in itself. Such a semblance of being-in-itself is conferred upon it by motion that exempts it from reality, to which it is harnessed in turn (*ND* 11).

Adorno is here almost repeating Nietzsche's pragmatic conception of “voluntary lies.” Adorno wants to point out that concepts are useful for philosophy; as a matter of fact, philosophy is only possible via the concept. “Necessity compels philosophy to operate with concepts,” Adorno declares, “but this necessity must not be turned into the virtue of their priority” (*ND* 11). The necessity of using concepts to illustrate reality should not reduce reality into mere concepts. Concepts attempt to illustrate what are, in a manner of speaking, diametrically opposed to them—“non-conceptualities” or objects. Adorno, moreover, interestingly points out that,

Initially, such concepts as that of “being” at the start of Hegel’s *Logic* emphatically means nonconceptualities; as Lask put it, they “mean beyond themselves.” Dissatisfaction with their own conceptuality is part of their meaning, although the inclusion of nonconceptuality in their meaning makes it tendentially their equal and thus keeps them trapped within themselves (ND 12).

This is how Adorno would depict the way “concept fetishism” in philosophy begins. It is through the entanglement of the object with the conceptual image or conceptual model used to represent the object that it is reduced or infused within the image or model. As a result of this infusion, object and concept become one or, to put it another way, the object becomes the concept. The invention of “meaning” is always an arbitrary way of en-framing the object; the actuality or totality of the object always escapes the meaning en-framed in the concept. Concept fetishism ensues when the concept is given priority over the object. In effect, in accounting for the totality of the object, instead of elucidating the reality of the object, the object is effaced. It should be clear, however, that instead of arguing for the wholesale abandonment of the concept, what Adorno proposes is an awareness of the stark fundamental difference between concept and object. “To be aware of this,” that is of the disparity between concept and object, “is to be able to get rid of concept fetishism” (ND 12). Philosophy’s survival, therefore, profoundly depends on this awareness, its new task is its very own self-reflection—the reflection of the non-conceptuality of objects. To quote Adorno again:

A philosophy that lets us know this, that extinguishes the autarky of the concept, strips the blindfold from our eyes. That the concept is a concept even when dealing with things in being does not change the fact that on its part it is entwined with a nonconceptual whole. Its only insulation from that whole is its reification—that which establishes it as a concept (*ND* 12).

It is when concepts become equal to objects that reification takes place, more specifically, when concepts take the place of objects. The challenge that philosophy will have to face, that is to say its new normative imperative, is the use of concepts in unsealing “the nonconceptual with concepts, without making it their equal” (*ND* 10). With Adorno's metaphilosophical critique of idealist philosophy, he is doing something very similar to Nietzsche's critique of the prejudices of the philosophers in *Beyond Good and Evil*. This entails, as already been mentioned, a revaluation of the language of philosophy, a language that will endeavor to reflect on non-identity by reflecting on the nature of conceptual knowledge.

C. Configurative Language as Praxis

The title of Adorno's essay, “Theses on the Language of the Philosopher,” is itself telling of the role of the “philosopher” in philosophical language formation. More importantly, however, how the title demonstrates how the philosopher is related to philosophizing as an activity that is fundamentally situated and is shaped by social and historical conditions. In opposition to the classical image of the philosopher as the seeker of the truth of things in their ultimate causes and principles known in the light of human

reason alone, Adorno urges that the philosopher is a subject who poses his questions about the objective world and arrives at a “plastic” understanding of reality, as opposed to knowledge of ultimate principles and causes of things. Moreover, the classical view, with its emphasis on human reason, seems to presuppose an autopoietic transcendental subject—a view held by philosophers from Plato to Fichte. As opposed to the transcendental philosopher, Adorno views the philosopher as an embodied subject who is situated in social and historical conditions, that is to say, normative conditions. Hence, the title of Adorno’s essay suggests that philosophy, as a socio-historico activity, is a byproduct of normative linguistic practices within which the philosopher is enmeshed and from which the content of philosophical debates is derived. In this sense, the language of the philosopher (and therefore of philosophy), inasmuch as the philosopher is the creator of philosophic language, is dependent on material conditions as opposed to the guiding light of human reason.

We observe that in the Western philosophical tradition since Plato, the obeisance paid to human reason—or some higher metaphysical principle which has been given various names: *logos*, *eidos*, God, mind, *Geist*—is a gesture that guarantees a privileged epistemic position for philosophy. This imagined epistemic guarantor that secures philosophy’s privileged position also guarantees philosophy its privileged language—a language that has sole access to the truth or Being. For Adorno, the philosopher’s bad faith is his

failure or resistance to acknowledge the contradiction involved in blindly accepting this privileged position of philosophical language. In other words, what the traditional philosopher resists is the fact that philosophy is in crisis because, first, that it has been too presumptuous about its purpose and, second, that it feigns indifference towards this presumptuousness. This occurs because, according to Adorno, philosophy gets enmeshed within its own reified language. Being suspicious of the privileged position of philosophy poses a challenge to the philosopher: facing the crisis that is immanent within the philosophical enterprise itself which means facing the crisis of the intelligibility and meaningfulness of its own language.¹¹⁷ The over-valorization of the assumed *metaphysical presence* in the traditional language of philosophy, that is to say the abstractness of its method and goal, compels the philosopher to draw his attention away from socio-historico-politico conditions. Rather, what traditional philosophy does is to mount its reified and well-knit network of concepts above material conditions which are subordinated to "rational" and "clear" descriptions of these conditions. Through this subordination of reasoned language over material conditions, the philosopher ignores the fact that the language he uses to describe so-called mundane objects is profoundly determined by these objects themselves. The philosophical enterprise is, therefore, an

¹¹⁷ Cf. Gandesha, "The 'Aesthetic Dignity of Words': Adorno's Philosophy of Language," 150.

insular activity. Adorno writes in the first volume of his *Notes to Literature*, “language imprisons those who speak it, that as a medium of their own it has essentially failed” (NL I, 189). This is, indeed, what happened to philosophy—it has become entangled in the bad faith that comes with the failure to address its own meaninglessness and intelligibility. The practice of positing what have been hitherto considered as the “universal” concepts of philosophy—e.g., God, freedom, and immortality—has been the underlying and unquestioned norm in traditional philosophy, a praxis which has become the “collective unconscious” of philosophers. Nietzsche wittingly calls this collective unconscious the “prejudices of the philosophers.” What Adorno wants to emphatically remind us is that the self-aggrandizement of the traditional philosopher—his alleged ascension to purity—is a disclosure of his imprisonment in the archaic language of philosophy, as well as its inextricable relation to the society which it endeavors to oversee and, thus, transcend. For Adorno, this illusion of purity is philosophy’s regression, its forgetfulness of its material conditions, “the bad conscience of its impurity, its complicity with the world” (CM 148). To the suspicious eye of the “new” philosopher, however, the universal concepts of philosophy that comprise its unconscious are not concepts that were begotten from without; on the contrary, they arise out of the dialectical interaction between thought and the everyday world.

Philosophy can only redeem itself from the bad conscience of its

impurity by precisely acknowledging this very impurity, that is, the indebtedness of its language to the philosophical tradition, which is, in itself, philosophical praxis. This is tantamount to pulling philosophy down to its socio-historical and material roots, which is the same thing that Nietzsche means when he proposes a self-reflection of the physiological conditions that make philosophy possible. The rootedness of the philosophical enterprise in social practices, which are themselves rooted in our physiological constitution, could not be emphasized enough and the constant and conscious resistance to succumb to the hubristic purity of conceptual language, notwithstanding some form of "enlightened" discourse, is the challenge of the new philosopher. This challenge entails a de-centering of the form that philosophical language took and a reorientation of philosophical discourse in praxis, that is to say, in the mundane or the socio-historico-politico sphere. At first there will be complaints about the mismatch between universal concepts and particular objects, but this is a necessary step in the reorientation, which is also to say a reorientation in "difference."

Adorno begins the "Theses on the Language of the Philosopher" by declaring that "The distinction between form and content in philosophical language . . . is based on the view that concepts and, with them, words are abbreviations of a multiplicity of characteristics whose unity is constituted solely by consciousness" (*TLP* 1). He, moreover, points out that the

separation between form and content is a theoretical practice which belongs specifically to idealist philosophy, which is best represented by both the Platonic and Cartesian variants of metaphysical dualism. This starting point is also rehearsed in the mature *Negative Dialectics* (although Adorno mentions Kant and Hegel to be representatives of idealist philosophy here): “A relationship of form and content has become the form itself. It is inalienably the form of a content—an extreme sublimation of the form-content dualism in detached and absolutized subjectivity” (*ND* 333). The hitherto mentioned emphasis on “presence” or some ideal metaphysical substratum is incarnated via absolutized subjectivity—or the grammatically hypostasized “I” for Nietzsche. Adorno points out that this subject is the sublimation of the form-content dualism, meaning it is the representation of reification par excellence. Further, this absolutized or reified subject is only possible through language—it is the absolute subject who allegedly hovers over objective reality and, hence, the one who names objects. “It is the sign of all reification,” Adorno insists, “through idealist consciousness that things can be named arbitrarily” (*TLP* 1). In this sense, objects are considered to be at the disposal of the formal intellect because thinking, according to Adorno, “seizes the things exclusively as functions of thought, names have become arbitrary: they are free positings of consciousness” (*TLP* 1). Thus, reification is the result of the formal practice of reducing actual objects into mere names; moreover, in this formalized process, concepts that purport to name

objects become interchangeable—meaning, that the system of barter occurs at the linguistic level, that is, among concepts, while particulars are shoved aside and forgotten. This is, to some extent, a reversal of Heidegger's reproach of our "forgetfulness of Being" in that Adorno's reproach is philosophy's forgetfulness of the object or the particular. This move on Adorno's part, therefore, radicalizes the relation between concepts (universals) and objects (particulars). He refers to the "ontic contingency" (as opposed to ontological necessity) of the alleged "unity of concepts" which is disclosed in the exchangeability of names. Hence, universals in this sense "stand only in a representational relation to that which they intend, not in a concretely objective one" (*TLP* 1). This *meta-critical* epistemic outlook is directly opposite to the two versions of representation or epistemic abstractions that have been appropriated in the Western tradition since the Ancient Greeks: the Platonic *eidos* and the Aristotelian *morphe*. These two versions of representation, each to its own, perform a formalization of the object, the Platonic giving priority to the universal cast or idea of the object while relegating the object to the superfluous world of flux, and the Aristotelian making the object the basis of abstract forms but considering the *act of abstraction* the starting point of knowledge, and again leaving the corporeal substance to a non-intelligible realm.

In relation to the above, Gandesha remarks that Adorno is probably trying to "linguistify" the Kantian distinction between "deductive

judgments” and “reflective judgments,” the former being “transcendental” and the latter being “historical.”¹¹⁸ Adorno’s revaluation of the language of philosophy presupposes this important distinction. We have seen his misgivings towards idealist epistemologies whose deductive judgments about the world subsume objects under predetermined universal casts; Adorno wishes to salvage objects from this reificatory process which is immanent in the language of traditional philosophy—what these universal concepts are able to do is merely to make objects their subordinates without enlightening us about the real nature of these objects. The notion of reflective judgments is, therefore, telling for Adorno’s purposes; it is, interestingly, a notion that appears in Kant’s third *Critique* where aesthetics is at the centerpiece of discussion. What this entails for Adorno is a possibility of making “conceptual” judgments about the world without reducing it to the conceptual, a move which presupposes a reorientation of language in the historical. This reorientation comes in the form of a critical outlook on language.

This critique of language does not merely have to concern itself with the ‘adequation’ of words to things, but just as equally with the state of the words on their own terms. It is to be asked of the words themselves how far they are capable of bearing the intentions attributed to them, to

¹¹⁸ Gandesha specifically writes: “The ‘Theses’ could be said, then, to, as it were, linguistify Kant’s differentiation between deductive judgments that subsume particulars beneath preexisting universals and reflective judgments that generate universals out of particulars. The former is transcendental; the latter, historical.” Gandesha, “The ‘Aesthetic Dignity of Words’: Adorno’s Philosophy of Language,” 152.

what extent their power has been historically extinguished, how far they can be configuratively preserved. The criterion of this is essentially the *aesthetic* dignity of words (*TLP* 9).

It is through the aesthetic outlook that a critique of language could ensue. The "aesthetic dignity" of words speaks not of the capacity of words to be true in themselves, but of their capacity to *tell* something true about the objects they represent. In these terms Adorno approaches the critique of language via a reorientation of philosophical critique in experiences which are historically mediated, a space where aesthetics assumes an epistemological character.¹¹⁹ Once more, Nietzsche's aesthetic-pragmatic epistemology is confirmed. It could be surmised from this that, Adorno's aim is not to abandon a conception of truth, but to reevaluate, à la Nietzsche, our old notion of truth. Like Nietzsche, Adorno is concerned about a reconceptualization of a notion of truth that is immanent in normative practices, an alternative notion of truth that could be sustained after abandoning the traditional or idealist model of truth or, in Nietzsche's sense, after the overcoming of the metaphysical bias. Such a new conception of truth would position itself diametrically to dogmatic (pre-Kantian) and subjectivist (Fichtean) conceptions of truth.¹²⁰ Again, à la Nietzsche,

¹¹⁹ This approach, according to Bowie, is very similar to Schlegel's and Novalis' theory of language and *Poesie*, where the "idealist" (in Adorno's sense) notion of the subject as the self-transparent ground of truth is undermined. See Bowie, *From Romanticism to Critical Theory*, 259.

¹²⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, 258.

Adorno's revaluation of the language of philosophy involves a radical transmutation of the concept-object dialectic. The idealist practice of subsuming objects under deductive judgments is opposed to and replaced by what Adorno calls "configurative" language. Via this option, it is possible to think of concepts as "materially prefigured" instead of prefiguring the objects. The idealist obsession with clear and definitive propositions is actually an unconscious byproduct of the "material content" of words. This is to say that linguistic expressions, and philosophical expressions in particular, are dependent on the historical content stored in words. Adorno maintains:

The conventional terminology—no matter how ruined—is to be preserved, and today the new words of the philosopher are formed solely out of the changed configuration of words, which stand in history; not by the invention of a language that scarcely recognizes the power of history over the word, but instead strives to avoid it in a private 'concreteness' only apparently guaranteed outside history (*TLP* 6).

We have seen above how both fundamental ontology and logical positivism, which to Adorno constitute two sides of the idealist coin, end up being untruthful to their claims because of their banal acceptance of the inherent meaning of words or concepts and their concealment of the groundedness of philosophy in socio-historico-political practices. The fundamental ontology advanced by Heidegger, although an attempt to overcome the illusory straightforwardness and historical naiveté of the

logical positivists, does not precisely ground language in history; rather, Heidegger ontologizes history and views it as "historicity." Adorno remarks,

Heidegger's language flees from history, yet without escaping it. The places that his terminology occupies are altogether locations of conventional philosophical and theological terminology, which shimmers through and performs the words before they take on a life of their own. At the same time, Heidegger's manifest language fails – in the dialectical relation with the conventional language of philosophy – to uncover completely the latter's disintegration (*TLP* 6).¹²¹

In other words, Adorno thinks that Heidegger, because of the latter's ontologization of history as existential historicity, universalizes the historical experiences of actual history. Heidegger's ontological project, a pre-scientific discourse about objects in the world, flees history inasmuch as it universalizes historical experiences; this turns a deaf ear to the historical relation between concepts and objects. The Heideggerian model, therefore, instead of overcoming the transcendental philosophical tradition, retreats behind the idealist tradition it seeks to circumvent. Or, to say the least, this is the story that Adorno presents. In this sense, fundamental ontology ends up in a blind alley.

Adorno's proposal of a "configurative language" is, to some extent, a

¹²¹ "Heidegger's philosophy," writes Adorno in *The Jargon of Authenticity*, "which takes so much advantage of its ability to listen, renders itself deaf to words. The emphatic nature of this philosophy arouses the belief that it fits itself into the words, while it is only a cover for arbitrariness" (*JA* 47).

hybrid between an empirical outlook on worldly objects and a dramatization of conceptual thinking. If the challenge for philosophy is its openness to the new, then its reorientation in objects and an attempt to invent new ways of talking about these objects should be instigated as philosophy's new normativity. This, for Adorno, calls for a reorientation of philosophy in the "ontic" character of social practices, as opposed to Heidegger's ontological flight. Thus, praxis takes center stage in Adorno's philosophy of language—whereas praxis, in this context, means focusing on the historical situatedness and participation of an agent—that is, a decentering of the unified transcendent subject. Moreover, praxis also entails the philosopher's task of linguistic reconfiguration, based not only on what he inherits from the philosophical tradition itself, but from historical contingencies as well. In other words, praxis should open itself to the non-identical and should refuse any ontologization or reification of the non-identical.

Configurative language conceives the language of philosophy as "materially prefigured" (*TLP* 3). As such, language is seen to be non-representational in the sense that it is prefigured by a multiplicity of shifting and malleable contexts. There is active resistance on the part of traditional philosophy to such "risky" conception of language, for it undermines the definiteness of meaning that is supposed to underlie grand philosophical claims. Adorno suggests that philosophy should learn how to open itself up to the risky business of actively using words in new configurations or

constellations, while, at the same time, dialectically grounding these configurations in the language of the philosophical tradition and in the contingent sphere of the social, historical, and political. Adorno, in *Notes to Literature*, uses the analogy of the strangeness of learning foreign words—a kind of “exogamy of language, which would like to escape from the sphere of what is always the same . . .” (NL I, 187). The foreign word, like the essay, functions as it were the very epitome of the non-identical, for it resists a straightforward identification of that which it names—a shaking off of a simple “basically logical world that so perfectly suits the defense of the status quo” (AR 103). As such, the non-identical provides an insight into the very nature of language. Moreover, the non-identical also offers us an insight into how language is the very medium through which the creation of the new is carried out within the continuum of tradition or of the old. Adorno points out as well that language can only puncture the obstinate protective fiber of tradition by means of a “shock,” for it “may now be the only way to reach human beings through language” (NL I, 192). This is the shock posed against the status quo; the enigma of the foreign word (and again akin to the non-systematic form of the essay)—a linguistic instance of the non-identical—function to untie the tight knot of conceptual language that prevails in philosophical discourse. Loosening the grip of conceptual language could only mean one thing for philosophy: its reorientation in history and the disclosure of uncharted constellations.

PART TWO

THE PRACTICE OF CRITICAL THEORY

Chapter Four: Early Critical Theory and the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

This chapter opens up the second part of this study, which is my attempt to rethink and re-conceptualize a notion of critical theory that could accommodate both Nietzsche and Adorno. I am arguing that the critical style of Nietzsche and Adorno could be considered instances of what I refer to as “critical disclosure” or “disclosing critique,” a notion of critical theory drawn from the recent writings of Axel Honneth and Nikolas Kompridis. Articulating the idea of critical disclosure and how it is related to the critical style of Nietzsche and Adorno presuppose surveying the development of critical theory, specifically Frankfurt School critical theory, from the time Max Horkheimer assumed directorship of the *Institut für Sozialforschung* (Institute for Social Research). Discussing and responding to certain criticisms made by Habermas is also crucial, for Honneth- and Kompridis’ reformulation of the idea of “world disclosure,” as a valid form of social critique, is a direct response to Habermas’ criticisms of early critical theory, in particular, and his whole enterprise of a theory of communicative action, in general. I wish to add that Habermas’ reproach of the Nietzschean element in the writings of Adorno and Horkheimer is also a crucial aspect of developing a notion of critical disclosure. These issues will be tackled in the following three chapters.

In the first section of this chapter, I will recount the three basic claims or theoretical moves made by Horkheimer in his “Traditional and Critical Theory,” namely: 1) the anthropological turn, 2) man’s emancipation from slavery and the abolition of social injustice, and 3) the critical perception or description of tensions that exist immanently within societal systems, resulting in a shift from a class-based critique to a more comprehensive, post-proletariat account of a socially constituted emancipatory impulse. I also respond to specific criticisms leveled against the early claims of Horkheimer and the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*—such as, the Marxist readings of Phil Slater, Göran Therborn, and Zoltan Tar, as well as the more philosophical critique of the “early” Honneth—in order to show that these criticisms fail to appreciate the practical import of a post-Marxist social critique (in the case of Slater, Göran, and Tar) and the theoretical, even stylistic, value of a philosophy of history that attempts to narrate the tragic story of human rationalization and domination of nature (in the case of the early Honneth). I then move to elaborate on the link between the three basic assumptions of Horkheimer and the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, arguing that these three basic assumptions are carried over the post-Auschwitz writings of Adorno and Horkheimer. The second section of the chapter is a reconstruction of the basic argument of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* which hinges on a revisionist notion of “mimesis.” Since my purpose is to articulate a notion of critical disclosure, I will simply focus on the dialectics

of rationalization and emancipation found in the collaborative work. Specifically, I will discuss 1) Adorno- and Horkheimer's tragic history of rationality and its excesses and 2) I will demonstrate how emancipation in "art" and "philosophy" is possible via the reinscription of the mimetic impulse in language.

A. Traditional vs. Critical Theory

It is safe to say that what is regarded today as Frankfurt School-inspired "critical theory," as a distinct theoretical or philosophical position, can be dated from the moment Max Horkheimer took office as Director of the Institute for Social Research and began a substantive revaluation of the goals of the Institute in the 1930s.¹ Susan Buck-Morss identifies a couple of ambiguities enveloping the designation "critical theory"; she says the term lacks "substantive" and "historical" precision.² Buck-Morss' remarks are understandable, since it is true that the term critical theory was not applied

¹ Cf. David M. Rasmussen, "Critical Theory and Philosophy," in *The Handbook of Critical Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1999), 17. The theoretical focus of the Institute under Horkheimer's watch radically shifted from the somewhat scientific or empirical Marxism of Carl Grünberg, the first director of the Institute, to a more interdisciplinary program that incorporated the methods of economics, psychology, history, and philosophy. Horkheimer's Institute was to become more openly attuned to the German philosophical tradition beyond Marxism, that is to say, the tradition stemming from Kant, German romanticism, Hegel, down to the works of their contemporaries Georg Lukács and Walter Benjamin. Moreover, the influence of Freudian psychoanalysis is also substantive. In contradistinction to Grünberg, Horkheimer's notion of theory is more eclectic and encompassing. For more details of Grünberg's directorship, see the following: Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950* (California: University of California Press, 1996), 3-40; David Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 29-31; and Rolf Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories, and Political Significance*, trans. by Michael Robertson (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1995), 24-36.

² Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute* (New York: The Free Press, 1979), 65.

by the members of the Institute for Social Research in a strictly singular fashion and that the term itself is an ad hoc formulation by Horkheimer to distinguish a particular mode of critical discourse of society from what he refers to as “traditional theory” predominant in the natural and social sciences in bourgeois society of his time that extends to our day. However, it is also true that in time rubrics (e.g., pre-Socratics, scholastics, romantics, idealists, phenomenologists, existentialists, structuralists, poststructuralists, postmodernists, etc), in spite of however arbitrary they may have been at the time of their inception, crystallize into more or less streamlined designations that encapsulate particular forms of discourses. This is to say that a label can, if only in a modest and symbolic way, describe the specific attitude or characteristics of a discourse which render it to be accepted as a distinct theoretical or philosophical position.

In addition to Buck-Morss’s observation, Martin Jay remarks that one of the reasons why the exact meaning of critical theory is difficult to pin down is because Horkheimer’s program was, in part, the recovery of theory from “closed philosophical systems.”³ This placed critical theory, especially during its formative years from the 1930s-1940s, in a position where it was constantly differentiating itself from and aligning itself with other philosophical positions. Because of Horkheimer’s aversion to closed philosophical systems that ignore the social and historical bases of

³ Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, 41.

knowledge formation, critical theory, Jay notes, “was expressed through a series of critiques of other thinkers and philosophical traditions.”⁴ Horkheimer’s vision was to reinstitute a critical theory of society that dialectically engages with the changing currents in society and the philosophical tradition, beyond the confines of scientific Marxism, that is to say, the integration of philosophy and social critique. The very openness, and perhaps one could say universality, of Horkheimer’s formulation has resulted not only in the development of Frankfurt School critical theory as we know it today, but also to a myriad of strands of *critical theories* that emerged especially after the Second World War which, one way or the other, are inspired by the basic call for the integration of philosophy and social criticism. The eclecticism of critical theory was not simply a rehearsal of the philosophical tradition, but, rather, a sustained revaluation of the tradition. So, rather than a theoretical groping, the revaluation of these philosophers and their recasting meant the reorientation of theory to its very own self-understanding. For example, Horkheimer, in his inaugural address “The Present Situation of Social Philosophy and the Tasks of an Institute for Social Research” delivered in 1931, bluntly admonishes that those who interpret the Spirit as some sort of quintessential principle that slices history and intervenes in human activity seriously misrepresent Hegel; while those who reduce society to the economy while ignoring the psychical and cultural life

⁴ *Ibid.*

of human beings have a misguided idea of Marx's insights (BPSS 12). Under Horkheimer's directorship, there was a deliberate movement away from scientific Marxism that characterized the thrust of the Institute during its first decade under Carl Grünberg. Beyond scientific Marxism, Horkheimer, together with an extraordinary group of intellectuals (Adorno, Pollock, Lowenthal, Fromm, Neumann, Marcuse), sought to reevaluate the philosophical tradition with new eyes. This did not mean the total rejection of Marxism, but, rather, the recasting of the ideas of Marx. Marx, however, would now be joined by a diverse array of thinkers, such as, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Weber, and Freud, to name but a few. This new openness to other philosophical trends would also be corroborated by Horkheimer's program of an interdisciplinary critical theory. On the whole, the task of critical theory under the Institute's new leadership is the overcoming of the divorce between Spirit and reality, that is, between the psychical and the material conditions of human existence, by means of a dialectical interweaving of these two spheres.

Despite the substantive and historical ambiguities surrounding the term critical theory, it is possible to illustrate, albeit in an ad hoc way, some defining characteristics that would help us consider critical theory as a sustained theoretical or philosophical position. Horkheimer's early essay "Traditional and Critical Theory," published in 1937, is considered by many commentators to be among the foundational texts of critical theory, and it is

in this essay that we find an early definition of critical theory as a distinct philosophical position. We can identify at least three assumptions laid down by Horkheimer (and it should be noted that he did not necessarily expressed these assumptions in exactly this way): 1) the anthropological turn, 2) man's emancipation from slavery and the abolition of social injustice, and 3) the critical perception or description of tensions that exist immanently within societal systems, resulting in a shift from a class-based critique to a kind of social critique that goes beyond any social class. I shall get back to these basic assumptions later in order to link them to the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and to show that these basic assumptions are, contrary to common criticisms, still inherent in Adorno- and Horkheimer's collaborative work.

"Traditional and Critical Theory," as the title suggests, is an attempt to draw a theoretical distinction between "traditional" theory and "critical" theory on the basis of their normative and practical goals. According to Horkheimer, while traditional theory, an approach predominant in the natural and social sciences, is based on the modern valorization of mathematical procedures instigated by Descartes in his *Discourse on Method*, critical theory, on the other hand, "has for its object men as producers of their own historical way of life in its totality" (CT 244). In contrast to traditional theory, which regards the social basis of scientific inquiry as external to itself, critical theory focuses on "real situations" or social and historical factors that condition the possibility of scientific inquiry in the first

place. Here, Horkheimer emphasizes the *anthropological* basis, the first assumption, of the mode of questioning of critical theory: "Every datum depends not on nature alone but also on the power man has over it" (CT 244). This means that critical theory takes seriously anthropological factors that traditional theory takes for granted, e.g., the perspectival basis of the questions, the nature of the questions themselves, and the nature of the resulting answers. In a more Nietzschean gloss, critical theory is emphatically concerned with the link between knowledge and human interests (material, social, economic, and ideological). Adorno and Horkheimer develop this Nietzschean line of argument in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, highlighting the human propensity to master and dominate the surrounding environment by means of rationality. In other words, the critical theory proposed by Horkheimer is Nietzschean in spirit because it aims to expose the non-rational factors behind human rationality, thereby revealing the subterranean origins of philosophical- and scientific discourse. For Horkheimer, all these factors "bear witness to human activity and the degree of man's power" (CT 244). Through the anthropological turn, the social, political, psychological, and cultural dimensions of life are regarded as grounds for critical analyses. Horkheimer also declares that critical theory is based on a "self-reproducing totality" (CT 242) announcing its materialist orientation; he follows a Marxist conception of society, by highlighting the material unity of the myriad parts of society, the inherent tensions between

these parts, and the role of the historical agent to instigate immanent change within the system.⁵ The study of a self-reproducing totality, that is, of society, called for an investigative method that would account for the various contradictory units that constitute the complexity of society without reducing the society into formal mathematical coordinates. In light of this, Horkheimer further sees his program of an interdisciplinary study of society as fulfilling this analytical requirement that counters the predominance of mathematics or what he terms positivism, “a mathematically formulated universal science” that “assures the calculation of the probable occurrence of all events” (CT 138).⁶ Horkheimer sought the liberation of social philosophy from the clutches of classical or formalist philosophy which he saw as being possessed by the blinders of abstract thinking. As opposed to the a-historical and universalist claims to knowledge of positivism, critical theory reorients itself to the social sphere, within which human activity and the contingencies

⁵ Cf. John E. Grumley, *History and Totality: Radicalism from Hegel to Foucault* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 58.

⁶ Horkheimer takes issue with the gulf separating philosophy, which constructs “theories beyond the reach of the empirical sciences,” and specialized scientific disciplines, which “split up into a thousand partial questions, culminating in a chaos of countless enclaves of specialists” (BPSS 9). With these shortcomings of both philosophy and the sciences in mind, Horkheimer envisions a brand of social philosophy that overcomes this division of labor through “the idea of a continuous, dialectical penetration and development of philosophical theory and specialized scientific praxis” (BPSS 9). What this entails, however, is not simply the emendation of protocols of research, but, rather, a situation wherein the empirical sciences take their cue from theoretical philosophy; while theoretical philosophy, in turn, becomes more open to the results of empirical research. Horkheimer suggests that the task of an organized interdisciplinary group of researchers (philosophers, sociologists, economists, historians, and psychologists) is “to pursue their larger philosophical questions on the basis of the most precise scientific methods, to revise and refine their questions in the course of their substantive work, and to develop new methods without losing sight of the larger context” (BPSS 9-10).

of history take place. Inasmuch as the ontological *terminus a quo* of critical theory is the social sphere, its claims to knowledge will never be final.

Alongside this shift from the mathematical to the anthropological, critical theory, for Horkheimer, does not deny the fact that, like Marxism, it enacts a political claim, which brings us to his second assumption: “man’s emancipation from slavery” (CT 246) and the “abolition of social injustice” (CT 242).⁷ In this context, the normative claim of critical theory is grounded in human *potentiality* and *liberation*: the potentiality of men to create and recreate themselves in society which presupposes an appeal to an idea of human liberation which does not necessarily entail total freedom.⁸ The emancipation of men from slavery and the abolition of social injustice constitute the practical aspect of this mode of theorizing. In the context of capitalist society, such a practical goal is only possible when capitalism itself is radically restructured from within, that is to say, when the actors within a capitalist society are able to recognize and question the existence of human slavery and social injustice that result from the system’s reified articles of faith. In this context, critique is done immanently in the sense that a

⁷ Horkheimer argues that all theories of society are politically motivated: “There is likewise no theory of society, even that of the sociologists concerned with general laws, that does not contain political motivations, and the truth of these must be decided not in supposedly neutral activity” (CT 222).

⁸ Herbert Marcuse, for instance, maintains that critical theory defends “the endangered and victimized potentialities of man against cowardice and betrayal” and “makes explicit what was always the foundation of its categories: the demand that through the abolition of previously existing material conditions of existence the totality of human relations be liberated.” “Philosophy and Critical Theory,” in *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*, trans. by Jeremy J. Shapiro (London: The Penguin Press, 1968), 145.

comparison between the professed principles, norms, and ideals of a society, on the one hand, and how they are actually manifested in current social practices, on the other hand, can be done. Put another way, the actualization of human potentialities is only possible under certain societal structural conditions—e.g., the radical democratization of capitalism—and that the abolition of social injustice is only possible when these conditions are met.

It is important to note that Horkheimer's characterization of the anthropological basis of critical theory, while in a way still rooted in a Marxist critique of alienation,⁹ is a conscious movement away from the revolutionary potential of the proletariat, that is, from a notion of alienation and emancipation inspired by the labor movement, to which a somewhat scientific Marxism lends itself. Despite this decisive shift on Horkheimer's part, early critical theory is, nonetheless, profoundly indebted to Marxist social criticism, more specifically, via Georg Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* (1920), specifically to the anti-determinist and anti-positivist of this particular work that ran against the status quo of orthodox Marxism in the 1920s.¹⁰

The third assumption of Horkheimer is the decentralization of the role of the proletariat in his version of critical theory; the shift is from a *class-based* critique of society to a more encompassing and cultural struggle for

⁹ For a succinct discussion of the Marxist influence on early critical theory, see Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas*, 40-44.

¹⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, 20-21.

emancipation. This shift from a predominantly economic outlook on society to a broader socio-cultural sphere marks the Hegelian influence on early critical theory, which is largely due to Lukács' Hegelian reading of Marx. However, in contradistinction to Lukács, who understood historical materialism as having no meaning outside the struggle of the proletariat,¹¹ Horkheimer asserts that there is no social class that could ultimately guide social theory, because "It is possible for the consciousness of every social stratum today to be limited and corrupted by ideology, however much, for its circumstances, it may be bent on truth" (CT 242). It is important that Horkheimer points out that every social stratum is susceptible to ideology inasmuch as every social stratum also has the propensity for self-reflection and emancipation. This, of course, poses serious difficulties for Horkheimer's own position—for, in trying to broaden the sphere of social emancipation, including bourgeois discourse that includes the discourse of theoreticians like Horkheimer, critical theory had to struggle to reconcile the ideological tendency of knowledge and its disavowal of the same, that is, it had to justify its normative claim of a critical standpoint that is able to present a more objective or honest appraisal of social pathologies while guarding itself from the aforementioned ideological tendency. The early critical theorists were, of course, openly aware of this difficulty; e.g., the notion of "negative dialectics" was developed by Adorno to precisely

¹¹ Cf. *ibid.*, 21.

address this problem. All revisionist thinking are, after all, susceptible to various forms of theoretical difficulties. Despite this, one of the aims of Horkheimer's vision of critical theory is the reorientation of the masses to the historical foundation of all human activities and to show that "the idea of a reasonable organization of society that will meet the needs of the whole community, are immanent in human work but are not correctly grasped by individuals or by the common mind" (CT 213). Emancipation, therefore, begins with this realization; however, for Horkheimer, this evokes not simply the emancipation of the proletariat, but, rather, the possible emancipation of each individual regardless of class. In other words, a critical theory of society should always be oriented with the ongoing changes in the material conditions of society; aligning oneself to a single class (proletariat or otherwise) results in a myopic vision of society. "Even to the proletariat," Horkheimer writes, "the world superficially seems quite different than it really is" (CT 214). This is not, however, a simple displacement of the proletariat; Lukács' influence is still evident inasmuch as the image of the proletariat as locus of the emancipatory impulse provides a model for a critique of society grounded in such emancipatory impulse. This is still Horkheimer's point of departure. However, early critical theory ramifies from the Lukácsian model in, at least, two interrelated ways: first is the expansion of the emancipatory impulse by locating it in groups aside from the proletariat and, second, is the emphatic theorization of the experiences of

those who are affected by the pathologies bred within the capitalist form of life, but who are not able to theorize themselves precisely because the conditions do not allow them.¹² With this preoccupation with the age-old problem of social representation, critical theory assumes the position of a comprehensive social critique. Horkheimer further argues that too much reliance on the revolutionary force of the proletariat results in a false optimism, a “happy feeling being linked with an immense force,” that, when shattered in defeat, turns into an ungrounded pessimism about the redemptive forces in society (CT 214). The task of a critical theorist is not simply to align himself or herself to a single class in society or simply indulge in describing the psychological behavior of a particular group, but, rather, to show that each class, category, or system in society carries within itself the very structural opposition or contradiction that brings about its eventual collapse. But, ultimately, for Horkheimer, the prediction of this collapse, along with the dialectical conflicts that come with it, can be understood by the critical theorist “as a process of interactions in which awareness comes to flower along with its liberating but also its aggressive forces which incite while also requiring discipline” (CT 215). The perception of the structural tension immanent within a social system or discourse could

¹² This basic tenet of early critical theory is rehearsed in the project of Axel Honneth, who develops a theoretico-practical notion of social recognition based on the experience of social pathologies, such as, disrespect and misrecognition. See, for instance, the arguments laid down in *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, trans. by Joel Anderson (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1995).

be viewed as a redemptive force, whereby the awareness of an agent is the critical nudge that opposes itself to the defenders of the status quo and the conformists. More importantly, critical theory, in this context, becomes its own self-reflective critique.

The justification of the three basic characteristics of critical theory did not come easy for Horkheimer and the members of the Frankfurt School. Horkheimer, for one, spent the first decade of his directorship publishing essays that attempt to qualify the intentions of critical theory and the struggle to place the movement among the legitimate forms of social philosophy. This effort, however, met considerable criticisms, despite the explicit declaration, or perhaps because of the open declaration, of the political or practical dimension of critical theory. The criticisms home in on the promise of social struggle, of praxis, that the Horkheimer's early essay promises but fail, as the critics claim, to articulate both at the theoretical level and in concrete action. Marxist commentators—such as Phil Slater, Göran Therborn, and Zoltan Tar—are in unison in pointing out the failure of Horkheimer to tighten the nexus between theory and praxis. They generally complain that the notion of praxis in Horkheimer's program remains an inert philosophical category and the politicization of theory is substituted for real politics.¹³ We should note, however, that these commentators are criticizing

¹³ On the subject of the rejection of the revolutionary role of the proletariat, Slater maintains that by moving away from the proletariat or any concrete revolutionary force,

Horkheimer's theory of praxis within the framework of the classical Marxist notion of praxis—the radical subsumption, even abolition, of philosophy into praxis¹⁴—which is usually interpreted as material revolutionary change, the literal translation of theory into practice. Of course, for the classical Marxist, what this really means is change by means of class-struggle—the proletariat at the helm. Tar argues that the early Frankfurt School failed to translate theory into practice, failed to continue the Marxist legacy by downplaying the revolutionary role of the proletariat, and failed to prove the movement's scientific superiority over established natural- and social sciences.¹⁵ I argue, however, that these criticisms merely scratch the surface and hastily downplay the critical potential of the early Frankfurt School by defending a somewhat hackneyed notion of revolutionary praxis—one modeled after orthodox Marxism—without considering the deeper implications of Horkheimer's proposals. Tar and the other critics fail to realize that what is

praxis, for the members of the early Frankfurt School, "became a theoretical, methodological category rather than a concrete notion of socio-historical class-struggle." *Origin and Significance of the Frankfurt School: A Marxist Perspective* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 63. Along similar lines, Therborn describes the method of the Frankfurt School as the "over-politicization of theory" which results in "the substitution of the theory as a surrogate for politics." "Frankfurt School," in *New Left Review*, 63 (1970), 73.

¹⁴ Marx writes: "The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice. . . . The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it." *Theses on Feuerbach*, in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 172-173.

¹⁵ Tar maintains that critical theory fails on three accounts: "first, the original program to offer a general theory of modern capitalist society; second, Critical Theory's claim to represent a continuation of the original critical theory of Marx; third, the scientific validity of Critical Theory in the light of generally accepted canons of the natural and social sciences." *The Frankfurt School: The Critical Theories of Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno* (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), 202-204.

proposed as a critical theory of society is one which becomes more sensitive to the continuing complications within society that educe new forms of social pathologies beyond the classical proletariat-bourgeois structure. Moreover, beyond the standpoint of theory, there are significant historical factors that contributed to the Frankfurt School's revaluation of the concept of praxis. The early critical theorists (especially Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse) and most Western Marxists during the 1920-1960 period were troubled by the orthodox Marxist emphasis on the role of the proletariat or the masses, who, despite having lived through the tumultuous circumstances of the period (like the Great Depression that ensued after the Great Crash of 1929 which severely affected and caused internal crises within capitalist societies like Germany) that should have instigated revolutionary movements on a global scale, embraced fascism instead. The reality of fascist regimes, particularly in Europe, prompted the early critical theorist to re-evaluate the role of the masses as revolutionary vanguard, an ideology that has certainly been refuted a number of times by actual historical events. It is possible that a keener perception and disclosure of actual historical circumstances can instigate, even forcibly, a serious rethinking of the concept of praxis and its consequences. The early Frankfurt School members, especially Herbert Marcuse, were very explicit about their misgivings with Soviet Marxism, which they thought interpreted the letter while neglecting the spirit of

Marx's teachings, a criticism that they extend to any proto-fascist regime.¹⁶

Adorno- and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is an unwavering reproach of National Socialism and the ultra consumerist American culture.

However, the not so obvious point should be made clear, that the reproach is directed more to the systemic or pathological inability of the masses to realize their socio-historical position, rather than simply throwing the blame at them. For the early critical theorists, this meant a reflexive evaluation of the Frankfurt School's role amidst all these historical events, and they understood praxis to constitute the theoretical analyses of the failure of revolutionary movements and their systematic integration into the status quo. Hence, the shift from the proletariat's privileged revolutionary position to a more comprehensive critique implies not the total abandonment of revolutionary agency, but, rather, the diffusion of the revolutionary or emancipatory impulse, as well as the recognition of the complexity of social representation. On the one hand, Horkheimer's proposed program, as a critique of a complex rationalized society, sought to be interdisciplinary by bringing together the discourses of the social sciences and the humanities, with the hope that such rapprochement is able to provide a more comprehensive analysis of society without being blind to the reality of ideology, power, and social injustice. On the other hand, it was a program

¹⁶ See, for example, Theodor W. Adorno, "Resignation," in CM 289-294; Max Horkheimer, "The Authoritarian State," in *The Essential Frankfurt School* (New York: Continuum, 1982), 95-117; and Herbert Marcuse, *Soviet Marxism: A Critical Analysis* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1958).

that was critical of the supposed “objectivity” or “neutrality” claimed by traditional theories that ignore actual historical facts.

Perhaps the most sophisticated and, arguably, convincing criticism of the theory-praxis problem in the early Frankfurt School is by Axel Honneth, who traces the failure of Horkheimer’s proposal for a sustained social struggle back to an incompatible philosophy of history. Honneth argues that since Horkheimer remains committed to an evolutionary model of history that traces human progress back to the human drive towards the domination of nature,¹⁷ he fails to ground his theory in “the practical dimensions of social conflict and struggle” and, instead, reduces social struggle to an ambiguous notion of “cultural action.”¹⁸ The nitpicking point for Honneth seems to be the irreconcilability between, on the one hand, the ontological designation of human nature as predisposed to the domination of nature and, on the other hand, the human propensity towards practical-critical activity or emancipation. This seeming inconsistency, for Honneth, does not only cast doubt on the practicality of early critical theory, but also on the normativity of Horkheimer’s proposed anthropocentric shift. For Honneth, a philosophy of history grounded in the human domination of nature is reductionist because it does not account for “the practical dimensions of social conflict

¹⁷ “The manipulation of physical nature and of specific economic and social mechanisms,” Horkheimer proclaims, “demand alike the amassing of a body of knowledge such as is supplied in an ordered set of hypothesis. The technological advances of the bourgeois period are inseparably linked to this function of the pursuit of science” (CT 194).

¹⁸ Axel Honneth, *The Critique of Power: Reflective Stages in a Critical Social Theory*, trans. by Kenneth Baynes (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1997), 5-31.

and struggle”¹⁹ within social reproduction itself and that this dimension of social action and struggle “is of a different kind than that of the nature-appropriating activity of labor.”²⁰

It is, however, important to respond to this sweeping critique of the history of the human domination of nature, which is to the early Honneth an embarrassing mistake on the part of Horkheimer and Adorno, one could observe that the early Honneth did not appreciate the critical potential of the work because of his fixation with the epistemological and normative legitimacy of a narrative of the domination of nature. Honneth’s early criticism leaves out what Horkheimer declared in his essay, that “there are no general criteria for judging the critical theory as a whole” (CT 242), which means that the criticalness of a theory of society is partly due to its keener sensitivity to the contingencies of history and their intricately aleatory ramifications in society: “the recurrence of events and thus on a self-reproducing totality” (CT 242). The problems of ideology, power, and injustice are more wide-ranging; and although they may be regarded as symptomatic of the modern age, it does not mean that they are confined specifically to the modern age or, in other words, it does not mean that they have not occurred before or will not recur again in the future. If Adorno- and Horkheimer’s philosophy of history appears evolutionary, it is because

¹⁹ Honneth, *The Critique of Power*, 17.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

they are conscious that modernity is not a spur of the moment phenomenon, but, rather, has a long history that has passed through several stages of development. Moreover, if we simply based a critique of social pathologies solely on the present, we fail to account for their historical “why?” which involves traversing their historical, yet contingent, patterns, their continuities and discontinuities. Moreover, Horkheimer asserts that “true theory is more critical than affirmative” (CT 242), in other words, critical theory is closer to the disclosure of societal pathologies than to the strictly logical and affirmative description of social reality. Honneth claims that Horkheimer, and later with Adorno, fails to ground critical theory in the practical dimensions of social conflict and struggle and that what is offered is an ambiguous notion of cultural action. Like Horkheimer’s Marxist critiques, the early Honneth fails to appreciate the implications of the shift to a broader conception of critique: that the diffusion of the emancipatory impulse, which presupposes the neutralization of Marxist terms, to other units of society lends more to a totalizing critique of society than the old proletariat-bourgeois model. Further, the old model cannot accommodate new emerging structural pathologies and forms of struggle, e.g., the diminishing revolutionary potential of the proletariat class as it gets more and more assimilated by the superstructure—that subjects who were once oppressed could turn into mere instinctual reactive beings or conformists, especially

under the mass appeal of the culture industry.²¹ Even the early Honneth cannot conceive of the practical-political promise of early critical theory—the abolition of social injustice—beyond the classical Marxist notion of praxis. But even the critical force of Marx’s rhetorical statement, that the task of critical philosophy is the “self-understanding . . . by our age of its struggles and wishes,”²² neither presupposes any special epistemological status nor confines itself to any single oppositional group.²³ Rather, Marx’s statement comes close to the role of critical theory as the disclosure of social pathologies and the reinscription of utopian hope, which can be located in any social grouping beyond the proletariat-bourgeois.

²¹ Adorno and Horkheimer remark: “The regression of the masses today lies in their inability to hear with their own ears what has not already been heard, to touch with their hands what has not previously been grasped; it is the new form of blindness which supersedes that of vanquished myth. Through the meditation of the total society, which encompasses all relationships and impulses, human beings are being turned back into precisely what the developmental law of society, the principle of the self, had opposed: mere examples of the species, identical to one another through isolation within the compulsively controlled collectivity. The rowers, unable to speak to one another, are all harnessed to the same rhythms, like modern workers in factories, cinemas, and the collective. It is the concrete conditions of work in society which enforce conformism—not the conscious influences which additionally render the oppressed stupid and deflect them from the truth. The powerlessness of the workers is not merely a ruse of the rulers but the logical consequence of industrial society, into which the efforts to escape it have finally transformed the ancient concept of fate” (DE 28-29).

²² Karl Marx, “A Correspondence of 1843,” in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, 45.

²³ Compare Nancy Fraser, “What is Critical about Critical Theory? The Case of Habermas and Gender,” in *New German Critique*, 35 (Spring-Summer 1985), 97. For Fraser, oppositional social movements are relative to the actual given conditions in a historical period. “Thus, for example, if struggles contesting the subordination of women figured among the most significant of a given age, then a critical social theory for that time would aim, among other things, to shed light on the character and bases of such subordination.” *Ibid.* This comes very close to my argument that the shift to a broader spectrum beyond the proletariat aims to locate emancipatory or oppositional impulse diffused among social groups which are all structurally potential oppositional forces. Fraser’s point is that there is a need to determine the social causes of a group’s disenfranchisement.

The early Honneth seems to put too much stress on the irreconcilability between the human control of nature and the human emancipatory impulse. Adorno and Horkheimer trace both these tendencies to the human mimetic propensity to make sense of an external world of objects, i.e., nature. As such, similar to Nietzsche's differentiation between conceptual- and metaphorical language, there is no absolute difference between our propensities for control and emancipation save only by degree. This explains why it would still make sense to speak of progress in terms of our human rational capacity to control our environment for our survival, development, and sustenance as a species. On the other hand, the main point argued in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is that the extreme manifestation of human rationality—when the dominating factor becomes an obsessive compulsion—does us more harm than good; nevertheless, and it is from the same propensity for survival and freedom where we recognize our emancipatory impulse.

Recounting Horkheimer's differentiation between traditional and critical theory and responding to the criticisms that ensued was necessary for at least three reasons. Firstly, to show that through the three characteristics laid out by Horkheimer in his early program—the anthropocentric shift, the abolition of social injustice, and the recognition of the diffusion of the emancipatory impulse—critical theory could be deemed as a distinct theoretical or philosophical position. Secondly, to expose the strong

criticisms leveled against the movement's early theoretical assumptions—in particular, on early critical theory's practical deficit, its failure to live up to Marxist ideals, the epistemological legitimacy of its claims, and the consistency of its theoretical or ontological assumptions—and to address each of these criticisms and to argue that they are not based on a more level-headed interpretation of the critical potential of early critical theory. And thirdly, by schematically engaging with Honneth's early critique of Horkheimer's seemingly unjustifiable philosophy of history, we signal the inextricable link between Horkheimer's original program and the philosophical content of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*; it is crucial that the early Honneth's critique of early Frankfurt School focuses on a reading of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. I have been prefixing the adjective "early" to Honneth in order to specifically refer to his original criticism of early critical theory and also to signal the fact that his early critique of Adorno and Horkheimer was still fettered to Habermas' own criticisms. Honneth has abandoned his original position in recent years, which also partly marks his break from the clutches of Habermasian communicative theory. Honneth realizes the critical potential of the disclosive import of the genealogical narrative employed in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and offers a more affirmative position as regards the critical potential of the book, and, thus, of Adorno's project as a whole. I am referring here to the notion of "world-disclosing" critique, a paradigm endorsed recently by Honneth, specifically

as a framework of making sense of Adorno's project. Also recently, a very similar notion of "world disclosure," a recasting of the Heideggerian notion of *aletheia*, has been endorsed by Kompridis in his book *Critique and Disclosure*, a revaluation of the normative foundations of critique. I will, however, suspend a more detailed reconstruction of world disclosure until Chapter Six, but it is interesting to note here that both Honneth and Kompridis endorse the notion of "disclosure" as an alternative to the Habermasian formalistic model of communication. It is also worth mentioning in passing that critical disclosure provides a more promising paradigm for critical theory that could accommodate both Adorno and Nietzsche.

By signaling the link between Horkheimer's original program and the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, I am not arguing that the book is a direct response to the criticisms leveled against early critical theory. Rather, I am arguing that, even if the book is not a straightforward justification of the three characterizations laid down by Horkheimer in "Traditional and Critical Theory," the spirit of Horkheimer's original claims profoundly informs the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. However, it is not easy to justify this supposition without radically shifting the way we read the book. It is, indeed, a strange book, both in form and content. What informs this curious book and separates it from the more propitious stance of "Traditional and Critical Theory" is the fact that it was written by reluctant émigrés in America

against the backdrop of Auschwitz. The consequences of the Nazi occupation in Europe which forced the Jewish members of the Frankfurt School to exile themselves has left an indelible mark in the tenor of their philosophical stance. But while the tone definitely changed, the utopian vision nonetheless remained. With regard to the presentation of the book, one could say that Adorno and Horkheimer consciously transgress the strict separation between the philosophical treatise and the artwork. Meanwhile, Habermas reacts to the “performative” style of the book, while brushing off the idea that the performance or demonstration of self-contradiction can have practical consequences for social critique.²⁴ Indeed, Habermas pounces on the aesthetic sensibility of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which is more an attack directed to Adorno than to Horkheimer. With Adorno’s introduction of aesthetic critique in view, Habermas arbitrarily insists on a division between aesthetics and reason, a division which easily puts Adorno among the enemies of reason.²⁵ If we simply accept Habermas’s claim that the aesthetic is the enemy of reason, then my intention of showing that the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* carries the spirit of the early claims of Horkheimer will become more difficult. But it is possible, as I will attempt to demonstrate in the succeeding sections and chapters, to conceive aesthetic

²⁴ See Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. by Frederick G. Lawrence (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1990), 119.

²⁵ Cf. Robert Hullot-Kentor, *Things Beyond Resemblance: Collected Essays on Theodor W. Adorno* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 32. Hullot-Kentor bases his critique of Habermas from Habermas’ “Postscript” to the German version of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Dialektik der Aufklärung* (Frankfurt: Fischer Verlag, 1986).

critique as an emphatic critique of society, one which highlights not simply the formal dimension of communication, as Habermas does, but is also receptive to the aporias of language which, when properly considered, provides a social critique that is more open to the non-identical dimension of reality. My discussion of Nietzsche- and Adorno's engagement with language and its relation to thinking, in the preceding two chapters, already provides a hint on this receptivity to the non-identical.

Before a more holistic view of the relation of the non-identical to the ethics of thinking could emerge, it is important to cast my succeeding discussion within the context of critical theory; specifically, as already intimated above, locating this revisionist notion of critical theory within the paradigm of social critique proposed by Horkheimer—the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* being the locus of my discussion, specifically focusing on the idea of "mimesis." It is also important to mention here that a discussion of Habermas' critique of *the Dialectic of Enlightenment* is indispensable if I am to paint a holistic picture of an ethics of thinking inspired by the notion of the non-identical. I have already briefly indicated in Chapter Three that Habermas views his position as a radical shift from Adorno's subject-object model of language, thereby downplaying what will be argued later as the very strength of Adorno's negative dialectics. This debate deserves ample treatment. However, before I move on to discuss the Habermas' specific criticisms of Adorno (and Horkheimer), it is a necessary step to show how

the basic assumptions of early critical theory are carried over the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. By emphasizing this link, we are also able to recognize the normative, that is to say, the deeply ethical and political content of the book which molded the overarching disposition of Adorno's post-*Dialectic of Enlightenment* works, such as *Negative Dialectics* and *Aesthetic Theory*.

B. Mimesis: The Dialectics of Rationalization and Emancipation

Again, I am by no means arguing that the three basic claims of Horkheimer (the anthropocentric shift, the abolition of social injustice, and the broadening of the scope of the emancipatory impulse) appear in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* exactly the way they were stated in the essays of Horkheimer. Rather, what I hope to do is to *mediate* early critical theory and the collaborative work of Adorno and Horkheimer by exposing the resonances between them, as it were. Moreover, I am not arguing that our reading of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is limited by the claims of early critical theory; on the contrary, I am proposing that these early claims already open up critical theory to the kind of ideology critique that Adorno and Horkheimer offer in their collaborative work. I mentioned above that the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* was written against the backdrop of the Second World War and the experience of European fascism, altering the tone of the more optimistic pre-Auschwitz writings of both Adorno and Horkheimer. While the seemingly negative tone of the *Dialectics of Enlightenment* is considered by someone like Habermas as a theoretic-practical failure, I wish

to argue against this that the collaborative work was pivotal in the further development of Adorno's oeuvre—for, as an emphatic critique of the human propensity for domination, the book carries within it the basic framework for a powerful and convincing critique of ideology beyond the paradigm of scientific Marxism. As such, the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, by going beyond the Marxist model without totally relinquishing it, opened up critical theory to a form of social critique (inspired by Nietzsche) that is able to provide a convincing, albeit admittedly fictionalized, story of the pathological development of human reason, while, at the same time, maintaining a clear disposition towards the normativity of human emancipation. As a theoretical work, the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is able to present a holistic narration of the historical development of reason against the backdrop of the relation between human subjects and nature. As a literary piece, its fearless use of figurative expressions and redescription of common philosophical notions, like rationality and mimesis, “disclose” interesting and inconspicuous dimensions of these philosophical notions—Frederic Jameson's refers to these constructions as “historical tropes” in the sense that they are descriptive metaphors that are able to reveal something about the “superstructure” that are usually hidden from conventional conceptual descriptions.²⁶ Within this context, Honneth is correct to point out that the

²⁶ See Frederic Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971), 3-59.

germs of “world-disclosing” critique are already traceable in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. We will notice that the ideology critique that the book offers hinges on and still revolves around the original themes laid down by Horkheimer, but now expressed in emphatic metaphorical- and allegorical constructions, like the retelling of the story of Odysseus and the Siren’s Song to recast the history of human cunning. As such, it is also a form of “aesthetic critique.” The philosophical- (critique of rationality) and literary contexts (figurative descriptions) of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* center upon Adorno- and Horkheimer’s innovative conceptualization of “mimesis.” Therefore, it is also in the concept of mimesis where we locate the anthropological and emancipatory elements of Horkheimer’s original program. In order to show this, my discussion will be ramified into the following: 1) mimesis as technology of the self and 2) mimesis as conceptual resistance.

B.1 Mimesis and the World: Rationality and its Excesses

The basic thrust of the “mimetic” moment examined in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is that the experience of encountering outer nature is construed by its authors as essentially an anthropological phenomenon. This means that the subject is the locale of the mimetic moment. According to Ben Morgan, the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* offers a convincing history of subjectivity which resembles and, I think, could supplement the histories of subjectivity offered by Michel Foucault and Charles Taylor. Morgan goes as

far as to argue that the difficulties in the accounts of Foucault and Taylor could be overcome if one follows the lead of Adorno and Horkheimer.²⁷ While Foucault offers a history of the “externalized self,” Taylor offers a history of the “internalized self.” The upshot of these histories, Morgan notes, is that despite the fact that they account for subjectivities that are socially and historically embedded, they, nevertheless, create a polarity between two types of subjectivities that are mutually exclusive. The result is either an *extroverted* subject devoid of interiority or an *introverted* subject that is insulated from his environment. There should be a way of accounting for a theory of the subject that acknowledges both the inner and outer spheres of human existence without resorting to metaphysical discourse. Morgan argues, and I agree with him, that Adorno and Horkheimer’s genealogical account of the mimetic impulse offers a theory of the subject that provides a non-metaphysical notion of “substance” and remains open to the contingencies of society and history.²⁸

Inasmuch as thinking, which is shaped by the mimetic encounter, is itself a human activity, the burden is still upon the social and historical subject. The notion of mimesis is itself difficult to pin down since, apart

²⁷ Ben Morgan, “*Dialectic of Enlightenment: A Missing Link in Histories of the Self*,” in *In Practice: Adorno, Critical Theory and Cultural Studies* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2001), 29. For Foucault’s and Taylor’s respective histories of the self, see Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986) and Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

²⁸ See Morgan, “*Dialectic of Enlightenment: A Missing Link in Histories of the Self*,” 30-35.

from the overlapping thought images, a streamlined definition is not given by Adorno and Horkheimer.²⁹ Nevertheless, mimesis is definitely related to a radical critique of Western rationality—specifically a prognosis of “why humanity, instead of entering a truly human state, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism” (*DE* xiv). “Barbarism” is another word for the human propensity for the domination of nature and social others. However, upon reading their text, one realizes that the image of mimesis is used as a synecdoche that represents the human cognitive activity itself, that is to say, how we humans react to and en-frame nature. As such, the juxtaposition made between mimesis and rationality is done to demonstrate the dialectical connection between two modes of reacting to and apprehending the world: rationality being the *mental* mode and mimesis being the *somatic* mode. While this initial impression is, to my mind, correct, the text is nevertheless more complicated. Let me interject here Karla L. Schultz’s observation:

If form is sedimented content, the term “rationality” carries an entire history of enlightened domination, while “mimesis,” reminiscent of mimicry and thus its biological origin, speaks of a history of cunning and repression, survival ploys, and thwarted attachments.³⁰

²⁹ According to Karla L. Schultz, the notion of mimesis, specifically in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, could be dramatized through at least five scenarios which basically arise from a cognitive process grounded in fear: 1) the sorcerer and the demon, 2) the myth-making hero, 3) the rationalizing libertine, 4) the deluded consumer, and 5) the furious fascist. See *Mimesis on the Move: Theodor W. Adorno’s Concept of Imitation* (Berne: Peter Lang, 1990), 15-59.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

Hence, the story of human enlightenment offered by Adorno and Horkheimer could best be understood against the background of our basic mimetic impulse—a pre-rational somatic impulse which, in the course of history, got dissimulated as human reason advanced, but it is an advancement which moved further and further away from our original somatic standpoint: our initial impulse to mimic external nature. Mimesis, in this context, emerges as the very foundation of the human cognitive drive; if such is the case, then Schultz’s description of the book as a “tragic” history of mimesis makes sense.³¹ This tragic history of the human mimetic drive reveals what Adorno and Horkheimer refer to as the double history of Enlightenment: “Beneath the known history of Europe there runs a subterranean one. It consists of the fate of the human instincts and passions repressed and distorted by civilization” (DE 192). What we conventionally consider as our progressive streak is actually fraught with an alarmingly dissimulated regressive tendency, more specifically, the tendency of repressing the body. The mention of reason’s repression of human instincts and passions echoes Nietzsche’s critique of the bifurcated world of metaphysics, a nihilistic worldview which rids the body of any significance. The basic premise of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* could be read as a variation of this Nietzschean battle cry. Adorno- and Horkheimer’s decisive rethinking of the mimetic drive is an attempt to disclose the hidden secrets of

³¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

Western Enlightenment; mimesis is, moreover, recast as a foil to the dominating tendency of human reason. Similar to Nietzsche's observation that the metaphysical bias is rooted in our fear of the physical world of becoming, Adorno and Horkheimer interpret the mimetic impulse as, on one level, a primitive reaction to the outside environment, which manifests itself as mimicry of external nature out of fear:

Where the human seeks to resemble nature, at the same time it hardens itself against it. Protection as petrified terror is a form of camouflage. These numb human reactions are archaic patterns of self-preservation: the tribute life plays for its continued existence is adaptation to death (*DE* 148).

Mimesis, in this sense, is a form of defense mechanism against the "threatening" inanimate objects of nature. According to Adorno and Horkheimer, this primitive form of mimicry develops into more sophisticated, yet still mythical, practices, for instance, magical rituals intended to influence the otherwise indifferent flow of nature:

The rites of the shaman were directed at the wind, the rain, the snake outside or the demon inside the sick person, not at materials or specimens. . . . The magician imitates demons; to frighten or placate them he makes intimidating or appeasing gestures (*DE* 6).

Magic as mimesis is a primitive form of knowledge of nature; it is seen more like a gesture of reconciliation which "still retained differences" (*DE* 7) in nature and, thus, still sees nature affirmatively. At this moment,

despite the fact that magic is a conscious activity of the subject, the mimetic impulse is not yet predisposed to the strict cataloging and control of outside nature. At this primitive stage, the subject emerges by mimicking the forms of the objects of nature. With the mimetic moment as an image of thought, Adorno and Horkheimer do not only provide an anthropological explanation of the origin of subjectivity, but they also show that the history of subjectivity simultaneously narrates the history of human rationality. Inasmuch as it is from this initial mimetic stage that the human propensity for knowledge develops, the double-sided nature of rationality also emanates from the same impulse. The alleviation of fear turns into a process of “naming” and “organizing” the objects of nature according to a logic that is external to nature. This once benign defense mechanism of mimicry and assimilation turns into a systematic and total elimination of fear by reducing or conquering the complexities of nature, subsuming differences under the logic of “identity” or the “unity of nature” (DE 6). The mimetic impulse, at this stage, becomes the human propensity for knowledge, that is, of enlightenment. But for Adorno and Horkheimer, the myth of enlightenment, the *belief* that we humans have conquered our fear by virtue of *knowing* what there is to know about nature, remains a myth of “demythologization” — the fear is only heightened and only takes the form of a “taboo” — “Enlightenment is mythical fear radicalized” (DE 11).

Gleaned from the foregoing, we could schematically reconstruct at least three stages that dramatize the tragic history of rationalization. First is the initial encounter with an “unknown” world which activates within the primitive subject a drive towards self-preservation, thereby prompting the emergence of crude mimetic instincts which would later develop into more complex forms of representations, cognition, and even self-reflection (e.g. magic). The second stage is the process of further complexification through the emergence of human knowledge (or the act of naming objects of nature) and rationalization (or the act of organizing objects of nature); twice removed from the crude mimetic impulses, knowledge and rationality pathologically develop into systemic repressions of mimetic impulse, which could also understood, as shown above, as the repression of human somatic faculties. This repressive tendency is translated into human consciousness and sedimented in history through various cultural practices, such as, science, philosophy, art, and religion. The third stage is the historical recurrence of the mythical control of nature and the repressive drive in modern civilization. The primitive subject’s mythical struggle with the forces of nature reemerges in modernity as the naturalized forms of conflicting powers within society and the repressive drive manifests itself in modern ideologies, for instance, capitalism, scientism, and fascism.

It must be pointed out that what Adorno and Horkheimer are aiming at presenting is a fictional genealogy of the dialectical relationship between

human beings and nature and how this primitive relationship evolved into the alarming state we are in today, a somewhat naturalized domination of nature. The initial mimetic encounter sets the stage for the development of inner nature (subjectivity) and the en-framing of outer nature (the environment). Albeit fictional, the rhetorical force of the genealogical account provides an insight into how rationality as a technology of both the self and civilization developed since primitive times; what Adorno and Horkheimer manage to do is to weave a fictional account into their critique of ideology in order to explain or disclose present day pathologies; such pathologies are gleaned from the standpoint of a narrative concerning Western civilization's rise and fall: "Human beings purchase the increase in their power with estrangement from that over which it is exerted" (DE 6). This method has, of course, met considerable criticisms, especially by Habermas. In spite of these criticisms, which I will deal with in the next chapter, the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* nevertheless offers us a comprehensive account of how the basic mimetic drive evolved into manifold systematic apparatuses of control, standardization, and domination, in a word, the totalitarian tradition which is already imbedded in the Western culture. In modern bourgeois society, the totalitarian impulse informs the private and public lives of each subject; it is the predominant status quo, the superego that moulds the way modern subjects conduct their lives, and part of the cunning of this impulse is that it is largely unacknowledged. The *unsaid* of

the Enlightenment is precisely this side of modern life that is rooted in the “pathologization” (to borrow a term from Foucault) of the mimetic impulse, the total eradication of the threatening unknown, the reduction of language into pure mathematics, the total commodification of cultural practices, and the subjugation of objects by abstract concepts. “Bourgeois society,” according to Adorno and Horkheimer, “is ruled by equivalence. It makes dissimilar things comparable by reducing them to abstract quantities” (DE 4). Hence, the reification of society is rooted in this predominant technology of the self that can be traced back to a primitive mimetic impulse.

B.2 Mimesis as Conceptual Resistance: Emancipation in Art and Philosophy

As a comprehensive account of how human rationality emerged from a primitive mimetic impulse and how this mimetic impulse itself has evolved into the instinct of domination, the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* provides a story of how the rationalization of society dialectically conditions modern day injustices. What is important in Adorno and Horkheimer’s story is that it neither ends up in the *extroverted* nor *introverted* subject, but, rather, offers a more holistic image of the subject’s role within society and, hence, a more complicated form of subjectivity. Their account of the subject is, however, paradoxical, since they conceive of a subject that is both *involved* and *detached*, at the same time: a subject that *participates* in and,

simultaneously, a *victim* of modern rationalization.³² This paradoxical notion of the subject, however, leads us into an insight on how social injustices are spawned. If we follow this view, we can understand social injustice as simply not systemic or external, but also having an inner moral basis. For example, on the use of propaganda, Adorno and Horkheimer write:

Propaganda turns language into an instrument, a lever, a machine. Propaganda fixes the composition which human beings have taken on under social injustice, by stirring them. It counts on their ability to be counted on. All people know in their innermost awareness that through this medium they are turned into media, as in a factory (DE 212).

Social injustice is not a straightforward phenomenon. In Adorno and Horkheimer's view, social injustice seems to have a reflexive character that the subject most likely is not aware of. In the case of propaganda, the inner emotional life of a subject is systematically exploited by external rational apparatuses. In this sense, there is a dialectical interplay between the experience of domination and the need for emancipation—the desperate emancipatory gesture itself becomes an unwitting means of domination and results in the overtaking of the subject's very own ability to voice resistance by acquiescence to a "falsified truth" in the guise of collectivity. The *otherwise* of this submission is, of course, the emotionally draining and

³² See a similar analysis by Albrecht Wellmer in *The Persistence of Modernity: Essays on Aesthetics, Ethics, and Postmodernism*, trans. by David Midgley (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1993), 3.

psychologically taxing experience of being typecast as a political reactionary or simply passive. In a highly rationalized society, the inner life of subjects figures predominantly as weakness: "Subjectivity has volatilized itself into the logic of supposedly optional rules, to gain more absolute control" (*DE* 23). Modernity, in this sense, spawns subjects who are easily manipulated by the existing order, e.g., the well-rehearsed pattern of anti-Semitism (*DE* 140) or the culture industry's grip on the consumer who is oblivious of the possibility of resistance (*DE* 113). This moment of "reaching out" by the subject to the objective outside world or society is an expression of the mimetic impulse in modern life, and the way that this impulse is being regulated by bourgeois society is an odd mixture of open sanction and measured curtailment.

Inasmuch as Adorno and Horkheimer trace modern rationalization and its destructive ramifications in bourgeois society back to the a primitive mimetic moment, they also offer us an insight into a more affirmative potential of the mimetic impulse, one that could be seen to counter the authoritarian tendencies of the other, domineering, side of mimesis. As opposed to the kind of knowledge spawned by the totalitarian tradition—obsession with strict strategic planning with the aid with science and technology, inescapable functionality in every nook and cranny of bourgeois life (*DE* 69)—the primitive mimetic impulse also initiates a kind of knowledge of outer nature that does not intend to subsume outer nature

under the unifying power of concepts, but, rather, respects and acknowledges the perceived differences in nature:

The concept, usually defined as the unity of the features of what it subsumes, was rather, from the first, a product of dialectical thinking, in which each thing is what it is only by becoming what it is not. This was the primal form of the objectifying definition, in which concept and thing became separate . . . (DE 11).

The process, however, is not simply an unmediated assimilation of outer nature, for this mimetic reaction involves the medium of conceptual thought. The subject, through this mimetic process, by no means captures the identity of a natural object (e.g. a tree), but only forms a linguistic image of the object that represents the “difference” of the object from thought itself—the relation is one of identity and non-identity: “language expresses the contradiction that it is at the same time itself and something other than itself, identical and not identical” (DE 11). This non-identical relation with the environment, paradoxically enough, leads us into an insight into how, for Adorno and Horkheimer, the dialectical dimension of conceptual thinking creates for thought the space for emancipation. In other words, inasmuch as thought itself results in the excesses of rationalization, the possibility of emancipation is also dialectically immanent in thought. If rationalization emerges in the form of the controlled alleviation of fear (instrumental spirit), then, on the contrary, non-identical thought emerges in the form of openness and reconciliation with nature, and not its domination

(reconciling spirit).³³ Adorno's notion of "configurative language," which I pointed out in the previous chapter, exposes the material constitution of language and it was intimated that it is through thinking's reorientation to its mimetic origins that it is able to escape the clutch of identity thinking. In the mind of Adorno, the material constitution of language is inextricably related to thought's openness and receptivity to the objects of nature. As such, if we are able to tap into this mimetic dimension of language, then Adorno hopes that we are able to salvage our conceptualizations of the world from the excesses of rationalization. This is what "emancipation" means as I used it above—reconciliatory thinking (why not call it mimetic thinking?) creates the space for thought's own emancipation from its reified self.

For Adorno, the language that is able to embody the dialectical contradiction—the identical and non-identical—in the mimetic moment is the language of aesthetics. "Aesthetic identity," he writes, "seeks to aid the nonidentical, which in reality is repressed by reality's compulsion to identity" (AT 5). Akin to Nietzsche's supposition that the metaphorical character of language is dissimulated by metaphysical language, Adorno argues that the mimetic dimension of thought is dissimulated by reality's (by which he means "society's") compulsion to identity or rationalization: "*Ratio* without mimesis is self-negating" (AT 418). This means that reason (*ratio*) is

³³ Cf. *ibid.*, 5.

in bad faith for not admitting its mimetic origin and, in its reified form, negates itself by totally abandoning its material origin. The “instrumental spirit,” Albrecht Wellmer recounts, “is in its very origins *oblivious* of itself, being oblivious of itself, establishes itself a universal system of delusion, a closed universe of instrumental reason.”³⁴ The mimetic impulse is, therefore, *inescapable*, but only repressed, silenced, uprooted.

Recounting the entwined dialectics of subjectivity and rationalization is crucial for it opens up the possibility of conceiving a third dialectic, that is, the emancipatory potential of aesthetic thinking. What I refer to as the “dialectics of domination and emancipation” is the challenge confronting non-identical thinking: the self-reflection of thought itself, by an acknowledgement of its mimetic structure, as a means of exposing, that is, bringing to thought, the self-contradictory nature of instrumental reason. Thought’s opening up to the non-identical, for Adorno, is neither a simple devolution back to the archaic mimetic stage (stark naturalism) nor is it a simple glorification of the aesthetic experience; for though aesthetic perceptions are concrete and somatic, they are, nevertheless, elusive and only appear in fleeting moments and could very well fade almost immediately (AT 286, 354). Rather, the real challenge, Adorno singles out in *Negative Dialectics*, is philosophy’s (conceptual thought) reorientation towards the spirit of reconciliation: “The cognitive utopia would be to use

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

concepts to unseal the non-conceptual with concepts, without making it their equal" (ND 10). As such, the emancipatory model proposed in the *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, fleshed out further in Adorno's later works, is played out in a *double movement of mimetic catharsis*—aesthetic perception assuming the form of conceptual thought and philosophy (better yet, reason) assuming a deferential stance towards the non-conceptual dimension of reality.

With the above foray into the basic thesis of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, we gather at least three premises or three ramifications of the mimetic process: 1) that it initiates the development of anthropomorphic practices that are capable of either reconciliation with or domination of nature; 2) that the uprooting of the reconciliatory impulse results in theoretical and practical excesses that are detrimental to the subject-nature relation and which pathologically results in a totally reified society—it is, to say the least, a historical trajectory that Western civilization has taken; and 3) that the emancipatory impulse lies latent within conceptual thought itself and that the resistance to total reification is only possible when aesthetics and philosophy open to one another in order to reactivate non-identical thought, that is, to bring justice back to nature (including us human beings) by maintaining a deferential stance towards the non-conceptual.

Chapter Five: Habermas and the Battlefield of Theoretical Leverages

This chapter is an extrapolation from the last chapter where I discussed the link between the basic assumptions of Horkheimer in his essay “Traditional and Critical Theory” and the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. In that chapter, I also reconstructed the basic argument of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* which, as we have seen, hinges on a radicalized notion of mimesis. In particular, I recounted, in schematic form, the tragic genealogy of Enlightenment reason from its origin as a basic mimetic impulse to instrumental rationality, then a recasting of mimesis as conceptual resistance or a way of overcoming the tendency of reason towards utter reification.

In this chapter, I will discuss a very important aspect of the history of the Frankfurt School which sprang forth from the arguments made by Adorno and Horkheimer in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: the debate that ensued which was spearheaded by Jürgen Habermas. The most sustained criticism of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* occurred within the confines of the Frankfurt School itself, that of Habermas and his student the early Honneth. However, it is important to make some qualifications: on the one hand, the young Habermas, resolved to work as Adorno’s research assistant, started with sympathetic gestures towards the works of Adorno which later on turned into a bitter polemic especially after the death of the latter;³⁵ Honneth,

³⁵ Ben Morgan recounts that Habermas’ “changing responses” to Adorno trace a “process of disappointment”—from an admiration of Adorno’s “underlying childishness” that informs his social critique to a bitter reproach of the same childishness. “Where the

on the other hand, as Habermas' research assistant during the 70s, began his career by deferring to his mentor and, hence, started off as very critical of the works of the early Frankfurt School, especially the *Dialectics of Enlightenment*.³⁶ However, as already mentioned earlier, Honneth has recently reconsidered his account of the early Frankfurt School through a re-reading of the critical potential of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and a more engaged reappraisal of Adorno's contribution to social philosophy which exhibits a proximity to the critical force of a world-disclosing critique.³⁷ I will look into Honneth's rereading of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in Chapters Six and Seven. It is sufficient to say for now that the thrust of Honneth's early musings on the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is profoundly informed by Habermas' own criticisms, that when reading his early texts one gets the feeling that he is simply repeating the claims already made by the latter. However, in his recent examinations of early critical theory, Honneth appears to have recanted most of his earlier claims and, in turn, does justice to the contributions made by the early Frankfurt School, especially Adorno.

earlier Habermas saw a social critique inspired by lingering childhood attitudes, the later Habermas sees an unproductive aestheticization of theory, even if one can understand how it came about in the drastic circumstances of the 1940s." "The Project of the Frankfurt School," in *Telos*, 119 (Spring 2001), 76.

³⁶ See Honneth's "Communication and Reconciliation: Habermas' Critique of Adorno" which was written for a special edition of *Telos* in honor of Habermas' 50th birthday.

³⁷ See Axel Honneth, "A Physiognomy of the Capitalist Form of Life: A Sketch of Adorno's Social Theory," in *Constellations*, 12:1 (2005), 50-64.

That being said, in the following I will focus on the dismissive critique made by Habermas in the *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* and to respond to this critique. I will specifically focus on the charge of “performative contradiction,” a *strategic* counterweight employed by Habermas against his philosophical opponents which also gives way to other related charges, such as, Nietzschean proto-fascism, irrationalism, pessimism, irresponsible aesthetic adventurism, and the lack of any practicable solutions to the problem of miscommunication or contradiction. For Habermas, the critical import of the proposals of Adorno and Horkheimer (which is also extended to other thinkers, like Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida) is undermined when the inherent performative contradiction of their arguments is exposed, that is to say, that their totalizing critique of Enlightenment reason is a self-contradiction because the resources of reason are used to undermine reason. Contra Habermas, I argue that this is not exactly the case and that Habermas might be putting too much weight on performative contradiction as a strategic leverage to justify the primacy of a formalized model of communication or deliberation. The unfortunate result is that critical theory is reduced to a “battlefield of theoretical leverages” which is counterintuitive to the practical goals of critical theory. I further argue, in the second section of this chapter, that Habermas appears to ignore the intention of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which, I think, raises some questions as to whether the

Adorno-Horkheimer and Habermas divide is overstressed, and whether, at the end of the day, they all share similar intentions and utopian hopes.

A. From the Standpoint of Contradiction, not Performative Contradiction

The appearance or form of a philosophical treatise almost always immediately prefigures the way it is read; oftentimes with the unfortunate result of deflating or totally neglecting the intentions of the author's rhetoric. The *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is one such work. The dramatic language and seemingly unsystematic presentation of the book, akin to the writings of Nietzsche, is the first thing that a reader notices; it is also the first thing that unsettles the judicious reader. Perhaps, the authors of the book, again like Nietzsche, intend to unsettle us. Indeed the book is formidable—it inspires awe and demands from its readers the exhaustion of all possible interpretive angles—partly because of its elusive presentation and partly because it *says* the *unsayable*—the self-contradiction of reason—which is often left unsaid in most philosophical treatises. By saying the *unsayable* or the unmentionable out loud one undermines the privileged position of philosophic and scientific discourse, that is, of rational discourse itself. Rational discourse often leaves out talk about the pathological consequences of rationality, it is often silent about the destructive tendencies of reason—of how the hopes of the past have sunk “into a new kind of barbarism,” that is, into fascism or the commodification of social relations. This is the dreaded *unsayable* that the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* openly declares in its first pages: that human

rationality, instead of ushering in a truly human condition, has mutated into a modern form of barbarism. But this is precisely what is often neglected or downplayed, consciously or not, by its critics, for in saying the *unsayable* we often learn things about ourselves that we would rather not entertain. But, for Adorno and Horkheimer, leaving the *unsayable* unsaid is precisely the bad faith of Western culture.

As we have seen in their genealogical account of the tragic development of mimetic impulse, Adorno and Horkheimer paint a grim picture of the history of rationality. This gesture is often interpreted as the authors' enfeebling pessimism. It is also for this reason that Habermas comments, to the effect, that Adorno and Horkheimer have turned from "dark" to "black" writers because of their use of de Sade and Nietzsche to conceptualize the self-destructive tendency of the Enlightenment.³⁸ Or, in other words, that the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is the "blackest"³⁹ of Adorno and Horkheimer's books because it does not have anything positive or constructive to say about the Enlightenment. This specious observation is the basis of Habermas' criticism of the book, which appears more like a criticism of—more than anything else in the book and more than the authors

³⁸ Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 106. Habermas' use of "dark" and "black," of course, does not have anything to do with race or skin color. The "dark" writers of the bourgeoisie, such as Machiavelli, Hobbes, Mandeville, and Schopenhauer are contrasted to the "black" writers of the bourgeoisie, such as de Sade and Nietzsche. Habermas remarks that the dark writers were still constructive Enlightenment thinkers while the black writers broke ties with the Enlightenment.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

themselves—the influence of Nietzsche. Habermas writes in his “Postscript” to the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: “It is no longer Marx, but Nietzsche who points the way. It is no longer a theory of society saturated with history, but a radical critique of reason denouncing the union of reason and domination.”⁴⁰ Habermas’ tone is telling, as if the shift from Marx to Nietzsche meant an aberration and the revelation that, in its present form, reason successfully manifests itself as destructive domination is sheer trifle with grave political consequences. Moreover, Habermas questions the “right” of Adorno and Horkheimer to criticize the Enlightenment project on the basis of Enlightenment’s self-destruction,⁴¹ as if saying that Adorno and Horkheimer unwittingly threw out the baby along with the bathwater. But already with the mention of Nietzsche and the appeal to rights, Habermas reveals his biased and deflationary reading of Nietzsche and too quickly downplays the critical potential both of “genealogical critique” and an “ideology critique that outstrips itself.”⁴² These philosophical positions, for Habermas, “slide off into the groundless” or, in other words, are devoid of any normative content.⁴³ *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* is notorious for its scathing testament against Nietzsche as a “decadent” thinker who

⁴⁰ Habermas, “Nachwort von Jürgen Habermas,” quoted by Hullot-Kentor in *Things Beyond Resemblance*, 28.

⁴¹ “If enlightenment is caught up in an unstoppable process of self-destruction, where then would such a critique, which made this diagnosis, have a right to such a diagnosis.” “Nachwort,” quoted in *ibid.*

⁴² Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 125, 127.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 128.

ushered in the postmodern sensibility, a sensibility which Habermas, echoing Lukács, equates with politico-philosophical “irrationalism.”⁴⁴ Habermas associates this irrationalism with “aesthetic modernism,” an attitude of “decentered subjectivity liberated from all constraints of cognition and purposiveness and from all imperatives of labor and utility,” in other words, anarchism—an attitude he quickly attributes to Nietzsche, Mallarmé, and Adorno.⁴⁵ In forcing the relation between aesthetics and politics, Habermas *strategically* formulates a strange rhetorical “*reductio ad hitlerum*” equation: aesthetics + politics = fascism. While we are not to question the overall intention of *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, which forms part of its author’s noble effort at ideology critique and the recovery of reason via a continuation of the unfinished project of Enlightenment, the specific claims made in the book leveled at early critical theory are unnecessarily disputatious. Without question, Habermas’ polemical treatment of Adorno and the early Frankfurt School has definitely put him and his project in a position from which his predecessors appear to have committed nothing more than a philosophical faux pas. Yet one wonders whether his theory of

⁴⁴ Habermas, *ibid.*, 83-105. Before Habermas, Georg Lukács, in his *The Destruction of Reason*, trans. by Peter Palmer (London: Merlin, 1980), already exhibited a sweeping condemnation of Nietzsche on similar grounds; Richard Wolin extends the same polemic and even more pungently, for example in *The Seduction of Unreason: The Intellectual Romance with Fascism: From Nietzsche to Postmodernism* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004). Interestingly and surprisingly enough, however, the young Habermas was more sympathetic to Nietzsche and in 1968 even wrote a postscript which outlined the merits of Nietzsche’s critique of epistemology, see “On Nietzsche’s Theory or Knowledge: Postscript from *Nietzsches Erkenntnistheoretische Schriften*,” in *Habermas, Nietzsche, and Critical Theory* (New York: Humanity Books, 2004), 47-67.

⁴⁵ Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 122-123.

communication actually squares off with the ideology critique offered in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* or, rather, ends up as a controversy-mongering or even a self-aggrandizing tactic⁴⁶ by someone, like Habermas, who is known for cautioning us against “strategic action” or false communication. Unfortunately, in this battle for theoretical leverage, there is much that is sacrificed philosophically and practically. For example, the lumping of aesthetics and politics results in the unwitting abandonment of the philosophical force of the notion of aesthetic altogether, ignoring one of the central theses of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*—that of the mimetic character of thought predisposed to non-identical thinking that is receptive to somatic, expressive, and communicative modes of relating to the environment. Habermas openly distinguishes between objective knowledge, derived from science and theoretical philosophy, and subjective human activities, derived from literary criticism, literature, and religion; in this quasi-Platonic move, the priority is given to objective knowledge.⁴⁷ This does not only resemble a

⁴⁶ A similar observation is made by Deborah Cook in “Critical Stratagems in Adorno and Habermas: Theories of Ideology and the Ideology of Theory,” in *Historical Materialism*, 6 (2000), 67. The Adorno-Habermas relation is, of course, an ongoing dispute in recent scholarship, for example, the heated exchange between Cook and Finlayson. See James Gordon Finlayson’s “The Theory of Ideology and the Ideology of Theory: Habermas contra Adorno” and Cook’s “A Response to Finlayson,” both in *Historical Materialism*, 11:2 (2003), 165-187 and 189-198 respectively. Another promising account of the Adorno-Habermas relation is found in Romand Coles, “Identity and Difference in the Ethical Positions of Adorno and Habermas,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Habermas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 19-45; in contrast to Coles, see the early Honneth’s “Communication and Reconciliation: Habermas’ Critique of Adorno.”

⁴⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. by Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1992), 20-28.

purist appeal to objective knowledge, but also, in the process of deliberately downplaying the philosophical importance of the aesthetic, Habermas, according to Robert Hullot-Kentor, paradoxically separates himself from the German Enlightenment tradition, “especially since Kant, the defense of reason has been conceived not just as inseparable from but ultimately as dependent on the aesthetic.”⁴⁸ If we follow the logic of Hullot-Kentor’s sharp observation, then we clearly see why Adorno and Nietzsche, as I have argued in Chapter One, are rightful heirs to German Romanticism, a tradition which seriously takes into consideration the Kantian supposition of the inextricable relation between reason and the aesthetic. It is unfortunate that as a commonly regarded mouthpiece of Kant, Habermas understates the significance of the Kantian preoccupation with the aesthetic.

However, with Habermas, the gesture of warning turns into a hypostasized paranoia, in the guise of theoretical sophistication and precision, that disavows the possibility of redemption precisely from the standpoint of crisis, distress, contingency, ambivalence, and the aporetic nature of language. It is from the standpoint of “crisis”—or what Adorno refers to as “the wrong state of things”—where any form of critical theory of society consciously emanates.⁴⁹ Perhaps the most unfortunate and vexing

⁴⁸ Hullot-Kentor, *Things Beyond Resemblance*, 32.

⁴⁹ Similar points are made in the following: Kompridis (CD 5); Coles, “Identity and Difference in the Ethical Positions of Adorno and Habermas”; and Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 32 and 83.

spin-off of this “battlefield of endless controversies” which, anyway, would end up in irresolvable antinomies, as Kant put it, is the forced decision to choose between Adorno and Habermas, an either/or situation issued at the expense of philosophical creativity, a notion of creativity that should not be confused with or reduced to political adventurism. The unfortunate consequence of the *reductio ad hitlerum* is that it reduces the weight and dynamism Adorno ascribes to aesthetic experience to a mere political caricature. Owing to his observation of the *bad* influence of Nietzsche, more precisely of irresponsible aestheticism, on Adorno and Horkheimer, Habermas further identifies several problems in the theoretical structure of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: the lack of cognitive and normative grounding of the authors’ arguments, the disconcerting “performative contradiction” in the method, and the absence of a prescriptive practical solution.

Habermas claims that a politically “risky” narrative of the human domination of nature is introduced in the book. The exaggerated picture of the pitfalls of human rationality is seen not only as a performance of methodological contradiction but also a practically irresponsible political gesture, on account of its reductive image of human progress. To put it succinctly, Habermas thinks that Adorno is guilty of a “totalizing self-critique of reason” that “gets caught up in a performative contradiction since subject-centered reason can be convicted of being authoritarian in nature

only by having recourse to its own tools.”⁵⁰ Habermas warns that similar to Nietzsche’s risky diagnosis of nihilism, Adorno and Horkheimer “bring abstractions and simplifications into the bargain” that make their own diagnosis of ideology, the dark side of reason, no less risky.⁵¹ By abstractions and simplifications, Habermas is referring to, on the one hand, the fictionalized presentation of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, a worry which he also feels towards the works of Nietzsche and the ones he regards as poststructuralists, like Foucault and Derrida. On the other hand, Habermas assumes that they are abstractions and simplifications, and hence politically risky, inasmuch as they are not exactly grounded in *the* normative structures that Habermas has in mind, i.e., the primacy of intersubjective validity testing as a way of resolving conflict.⁵² According to Martin Jay, the primacy of intersubjective validity is one of the bases of Habermas’ *strategic* use—that is, to gain theoretical leverage—of “performative contradiction” as a foil against his opponents, in this case, Nietzsche, the early critical theorists, and the poststructuralists. The charge of performative contradiction is used by Habermas to demonstrate the contradictions in the line of argumentation of his opponents, for example, Adorno- and Horkheimer’s totalizing critique of reason without acknowledging that such critique is normatively based on a particular logic that presupposes the use of reason. Moreover, Habermas

⁵⁰ Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 185.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁵² Cf. Martin Jay, *Force Fields: Between Intellectual History and Cultural Critique* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 29.

suggests that such performatively contradictory statements are contradictory since they are not based on an earnest attempt to “communicate” valid claims based on intersubjective exchange. In other words, contradictions, for Habermas, rest more on intersubjective miscommunication than on the ontological or structural level.⁵³ He attempts to propose the normative primacy of communication at the expense of his opponents, whom he thinks are not communicating clearly enough because their statements are not based on actual intersubjective exchange, but, rather, on subjective insights—hence, they are abstract, simplistic, and risky.

This preemptive move against risk is, however, misleading. Firstly, Habermas himself is guilty of simplifying Nietzsche’s diagnosis of nihilism, while warning us of its political ramifications, he ignores the fact that it was not the notion of nihilism that the German fascists appropriated but, rather, the notion of the will to power; for even in the most fundamental Nietzschean interpretation, fascism itself is a nihilistic attitude which, of course, the fascists would not admit to themselves.⁵⁴ In any case, we can observe that Habermas is resolved in overstressing the political adventurism of Nietzsche’s fascist and neoconservative readers,⁵⁵ but what is forfeited

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁵⁴ Specific details of this ongoing debate is found in a collection of essays edited by Jacob Golomb and Robert S. Wistrich called *Nietzsche, Godfather of Fascism? On the Uses and Abuses of a Philosophy* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002).

⁵⁵ See, for example, comments made in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* where neoconservatism and aesthetic modernism (“aesthetically inspired anarchism” or “postmodernity,” whose proponents are Nietzsche, Heidegger, Bataille, Foucault, Derrida)

here is a treatment of Nietzsche's ideas at a deeper philosophical level. Despite his emphasis on the normativity of communication, Habermas leaves very little room, if any at all, for philosophical dialogue or a possible rapprochement. Tracy B. Strong and Frank Andreas Sposito point out that the treatment of philosophers (from Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Bataille, Adorno, Horkheimer, down to Derrida) offered in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, despite having the characteristics of lucidity and comprehensiveness, is marked by a particular sense of disdain—"an intimation of naiveté, as if his [Habermas] subjects did not know that they were playing with something dangerous . . . that there is a dark violence to humankind to which these writers . . . are *apprentis sorciers*."⁵⁶ The upshot of this is that one can conveniently conclude that the *only* logical consequence of the works of these philosophers is one of catastrophic political paralysis, inasmuch as they are seen too *childish* and lacked the perspicacity to buttress their claims with acceptable normative standards. For Habermas, the skeptical stance against normative standards, or what he would sometimes call "value skepticism,"⁵⁷ is traceable back to Nietzsche whose critique of modernity comes by way of unmasking the perversion of the will to power

are lumped together and presented as enemies of the Enlightenment. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 4-5. Also see Thomas McCarthy's "Introduction," in *ibid.*, xi. The relationship between aesthetic modernism and neoconservatism is further explored by Habermas in *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate*, trans. by Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).

⁵⁶ Tracy B. Strong and Frank Andreas Sposito, "Habermas' Significant Other," in *The Cambridge Companion to Habermas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 279.

⁵⁷ See Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative*.

in reason which “sets itself outside the horizon of reason.”⁵⁸ Nietzsche, according to Habermas, has perfected the skeptical stance, for he shakes “his head over philosophical argumentation as though he were witnessing the unintelligible rites of a strange tribe.”⁵⁹ This characterization of skepticism is quite strange and, as will be shown shortly, misses the mark of the critical force of Nietzsche’s skepticism and philosophical skepticism as a whole. Furthermore, since Habermas can only perceive Nietzsche as a nihilist in the pejorative sense (a characterization that goes against everything that Nietzsche himself stood for), a nihilistic value is ascribed to philosophical skepticism, thereby extending the nihilistic charge to Adorno and Horkheimer (and, of course, also to Heidegger, Foucault, Bataille, and Derrida).

The absence of normative standards, which for Habermas are supposed to be standards or “values” for rational intersubjective deliberation, is a practical impediment towards the proper coordination of discourse ethics since it tends towards ethical relativism understood in terms of subjectivism.⁶⁰ “Value skepticism,” the *other* of discourse ethics, entails the death of philosophy (hence, of morality) and historically results in what Kant calls *Schwärmerei* (enthusiasm or excessive sentiment).⁶¹ We can respond to

⁵⁸ Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 96.

⁵⁹ Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, 99.

⁶⁰ See Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, 76 and 184.

⁶¹ See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by Norman Kemp Smith (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 128.

this Habermasian worry by rehearsing the response of Strong and Sposito,⁶² which they make by invoking none other than the very first words of Kant's preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason* that initiate us to the fundamental premise of critical philosophy:

Human reason has this peculiar fate that in one species of its knowledge it is burdened by questions which, as prescribed by the very nature of reason itself, it is not able to ignore, but which, as transcending all its powers, it is also not able to answer.⁶³

What Kant's statement registers is an "ambivalence" that is conditioned by thinking itself. That thinking is torn between the insistent demand of thought to answer questions that elude its very own powers, on the one hand, and the inability to empirically answer the same questions perhaps on account of thinking's very own powerlessness, on the other hand. Or, as Strong and Sposito maintain, that thinking is torn between "skepticism" and "enthusiasm,"⁶⁴ an ambivalence in the very act of thinking

⁶² See Strong and Sposito, "Habermas' Significant Other," 281-282.

⁶³ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 7.

⁶⁴ "From this reading," they argue, "one would say that the task of the *First Critique* (and that of genius) was not to establish rationality at the *expense* of sense with its doubt and certainties, but to establish rationality as a *balance* between the subjective and the objective, denying any of them." Strong and Sposito, "Habermas' Significant Other," 282. Cavell also echoes this Kantian insight and interprets it as an expression of the romantic temperament: "It is expressed in Kant's portrait of the human being as living in two worlds, in one of them determined, in the other free, one of which is necessary to the satisfaction of human Understanding, the other to the satisfaction of human Reason. One romantic use for this idea of two worlds lies in its accounting for the human being's dissatisfaction with, as it were, itself. It appreciates the ambivalence in Kant's central idea of limitation, that we simultaneously crave its comfort and crave escape from its comfort, that we want to be lawfully wedded to the world and at the same time illicitly intimate with it, as if the one stance produced the wish for the other, as if the best proof of human existence were its power to yearn, as if for its better, or other, existence." *In Quest for the Ordinary*, 31-32.

itself. While this upsets Habermas, Kant gracefully accepts this intrinsic tension within thought and construes it as constitutive of human knowledge itself. Kant is abandoning neither skepticism nor enthusiasm, but, rather, proposing a coalescence of these two tendencies of reason, to steer reason between these two rocks.⁶⁵ In other words, the Kantian ambivalence allows the human being to *wander* and lose himself in nature, like Dionysus, but almost simultaneously, the human being maintains a kind of *measured composure* that takes him back to himself, like Apollo. Adorno's radicalized notion of mimesis, thought's reorientation to the non-identical, precisely falls under the rubric of Kantian ambivalence: the symbiotic or dialectical exchange between concept and object or, to put it differently, the exchange between art and philosophy, proposed in *Aesthetic Theory*, opens up one to the other, one (art) assuming the form of the other, and one (philosophy) maintaining a deferential distance to the other.

I would like to follow further the proposal of Strong and Sposito that a radical reading of this Kantian insight should be made to caution us against the Habermasian move of downplaying the philosophical or epistemic status of other discourses, such as literature or poetry, that maintain the tension between the "comprehensible" and the

⁶⁵ "We now propose to make trial whether it be not possible to find for human reason safe conduct between these two rocks, assigning to her determinate limits, and yet keeping open for her the whole field of her appropriate activities." Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 128. The "two rocks" is perhaps an allusion to the mythic images of the mythic monsters Scylla and Charybdis.

“uncomprehended.”⁶⁶ The challenge for philosophy posted by this tension—which is already taken up by the early German romantics, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche and, more recently, by Heidegger, Bataille, Lacan, Foucault, Derrida, Benjamin, Kracauer, Bloch, and Adorno, among others—is the unabating reflection on the relation between philosophical language and poetic language. The supposition that skepticism (value skepticism included) necessarily results in irrationalism is simply misleading, since, as Kant shows us, knowledge or the human propensity towards knowledge is conditioned by both the skeptical and enthusiastic tendencies of reason. And if such acts of skepticism lead to exaggerations and outlandish claims, or come in the form of unbridled dithyrambs, “They may just have found us on a road in knowledge,”⁶⁷ or, as Adorno himself puts it in “Opinion Delusion Society”: “All thinking is exaggeration, in so far as every thought that is one at all goes beyond its confirmation by the given facts” (CM 108). If we radically follow the logic of this Kantian ambivalence, then Habermas’ criticism of Nietzsche, and hence of Adorno and Horkheimer, of unmasking the dialectics of Enlightenment “outside the horizon of reason” loses its credibility because it denies the capacity of reason to exaggerate beyond the logics of the common and banal, exaggerations that may lead us on a road to a better, albeit sometimes more painful, understanding of ourselves and our

⁶⁶ Strong and Sposito, “Habermas’ Significant Other,” 283.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 282.

surroundings. The suppression of this better half of reason is anathema to literature or poetry, indeed to mimetic practices that maintain the non-identical in thought. It is hasty on the part of Habermas to assume that an emphasis on the aesthetic dimension of experience would rid of experience's communicative dimension. Of course, Habermas does not deny the existence of aesthetic experience, but he does unnecessarily make a stark opposition between the two, specifically downplaying the centrality of mimesis in the formation of worldviews. Again, the point of Adorno's refusal to accept a definitive communicative logic and, instead opening up philosophical discourse to a variety of expressions or redescriptions, is not to totally deny the possibility of communication, but, rather, the "recognition that the current social reality . . . renders abnormal the state of performative consistency Habermas wants to instantiate."⁶⁸ This goes beyond Habermas' supposition that contradiction is simply linguistically-based and could be resolved via proper communication. As Jay writes in relation to this:

What speech act theorists like to call the "happy" or "felicitous" outcome of illocutionary acts may be hard to come by in a world not conducive to fulfilling other kinds of happiness. And a fortiori, the intersubjective overcoming of contradiction is even less likely to occur.⁶⁹

What Jay is alluding to here is the persistence of contradiction in a society marred by the wrong state of things. This is not to say that

⁶⁸ Jay, *Force Fields: Between Intellectual History and Cultural Critique*, 37.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

Habermas is simply ignoring the fact that contradictions indeed exist; however, he is wrong to insist that they only happen at the level of intersubjective communication. For instance, in times of natural disasters (e.g., massive flooding, earthquakes, fire, etc.) the ensuing confusion is not simply caused by miscommunication alone, but surely the confusion could be worsen, for instance, by faulty judgments or announcements which are meant to deceive the people in order to control panic and reinstall order. There is also a dimension of intersubjectivity that the Habermasian model appears to ignore, that is, the almost instinctual and selfless drive “to put others before oneself” in times of crises which is not simply reducible to sheer heroism or naïve sympathy—but this curious phenomenon surely involves some form of subjective agency which is not always prefigured by formal intersubjective communication. I hasten to add that this might be an ambiguous, yet more persuasive source of our utopian hopes.

B. Praxis and the Intentions of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

By extending his charge of nihilism (value skepticism) to the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Habermas warns us that Adorno and Horkheimer run the risk of presenting extra-normative arguments that render themselves susceptible to political adventurism. Habermas sees the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as undermining its own foundations—first, since it launches a totalizing self-critique of reason while using the resources of reason and, second, since it does not offer any positive alternative to the totalizing

critique it makes of the utter reification of modern life, on account of reason's regression to barbarism. This is another analogue to the charge of the absence of critical praxis in Adorno and Horkheimer; they are reproached "for failing to register the distinction between the 'world-disclosing' functions of literature and the 'problem-solving' functions of theoretical discourse that have been differentiated out in modern societies."⁷⁰ In his conceptualization of praxis, Habermas might be putting too much weight on the "problem-solving" or pragmatic dimension of language, while denying the critical or practical function of world disclosure. I will delay a more detailed account of the function of critical disclosure until the next chapter, but it is worth mentioning at this stage that the disclosive potential of non-conventional genres of writing or presenting things is linked to the notion of philosophical praxis discussed in the first part of this study. In the following, I would like to address further Habermas' claim that the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* lacks any practical import and also to argue that the primacy of communicative language in resolving contradictions creates an unnecessary demarcation between the pragmatic and the disclosive aspects of language. This, of course, is still linked to the charge of performative contradiction I have so far been discussing.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 36.

First, it is crucial to point out the specific intentions of Adorno and Horkheimer, which they clearly lay out in the preface of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*:

. . . enlightenment consists primarily in the calculation of effects and in the technology of production and dissemination; the specific content of the ideology is exhausted in the idolization of the existing order and of the power by which the technology is controlled. In the discussion of this contradiction the culture industry is taken more seriously than it might itself wish to be. But because its appeal to its own commercial character, its confession of its diminished truth, has long since become an excuse with which it evades responsibility for its lies, our analysis is directed at the claim objectively contained in its products to be aesthetic formations and thus representations of truth. It demonstrates the dire state of society by the invalidity of that claim (*DE* xviii-xix).

The not merely theoretical but practical tendency toward self-destruction has been inherent in rationality from the first, not only in the present phase when it is emerging nakedly. For this reason a philosophical prehistory of anti-Semitism is sketched. Its "irrationalism" derives from the nature of the dominant reason and of the world corresponding to its image (*DE* xix).

The first entry speaks of the intention of the "Culture Industry" section of the book. It is clear from the above passage that the authors present their criticism of ultra-consumerism and the all encompassing reality of commodity exchange by exposing how Enlightenment reason itself pathologically morphed into the "calculation of effects" and the

development of the “technology of dissemination”—or, of how “Culture today is infecting everything with sameness. Film, radio, and magazines form a system” (DE 94). For Adorno and Horkheimer, the calculation of effects or profit and the technology of dissemination are manifestations of societal control, of fascism with a *humanitarian* face:

The technical antithesis between few production centers and widely dispersed reception necessitates organization and planning by those in control. The standardized forms, it is claimed, were originally derived from the needs of the consumers: that is why they are accepted with so little resistance. In reality, a cycle of manipulation and retroactive need is unifying the system ever more tightly. What is not mentioned is that the basis on which technology is gaining power over society is the power of those whose economic position in society is strongest (DE 95).

The second entry refers to the section “Elements of Anti-Semitism,” wherein the authors describe how anti-Semitism, the subconscious driving force of Nazism, finds its most subtle expressions in capitalist society: “The persecution of the Jews, like any persecution, cannot be separated from that order. Its essence, however it may hide itself at times, is the violence which today is openly revealed” (DE 139). The psychological-philosophical critique of proto-fascism in capitalist society, through an examination of the realities of ultra-consumerist culture and anti-Semitism, is an obvious indication of the spirit from which the *Dialectics of Enlightenment* was written; the anti-fascist stance of the book is clearly not accidental. Furthermore, the

examination of concrete social realities—that is, of present societal conditions during the composition of the book—raises the question of whether the book is devoid of any legitimate cognitive and normative content.

As we have seen, Habermas claims that the performative contradiction exhibited in the book is counterintuitive: “Now reason itself is suspected of the baneful confusion of power and validity claims, but still with the intent of enlightening.”⁷¹ What this means is that Adorno and Horkheimer are in bad faith for using the very capability of reason, that of ideology critique, against reason. Habermas continues:

With their concept of “instrumental reason” Horkheimer and Adorno want to add up the cost incurred in the usurpation of reason’s place by a calculating intellect. This concept is simultaneously supposed to recall that when purposive rationality, overblown into a totality, abolishes the distinction between what claims validity and what is useful for self-preservation, and so tears down the barrier between validity and power, it cancels out those basic conceptual differentiations to which the modern understanding of the world believed it owed the definitive overcoming of myth. As instrumental, reason assimilated itself to power and thereby relinquished its critical force—that is the *final* disclosure of ideology critique applied to itself.⁷²

But if we carefully examine the above passage, we realize that a complex and important element in the argument of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is jettisoned, consciously or not, by Habermas, who arrives at

⁷¹ Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 119.

⁷² *Ibid.*

the conclusion that, with Adorno and Horkheimer's total critique of reason, the critical force of reason itself is jeopardized, that is to say, that Adorno and Horkheimer cannot claim theoretical leverage because they have demolished the very foundation of theory itself: reason. However, this appears to be a *non sequitur* and precisely cuts across the very critical force of the book. Adorno and Horkheimer are themselves very explicit: "The critique of enlightenment . . . is intended to prepare a positive concept of enlightenment which liberates it from its entanglement in blind domination" (DE xviii). So, on the one hand, critique (in the sense of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*) is set out to respond to the contradictions of Western civilization (contradictions which includes, but not simply reducible to, miscommunications), that is, Enlightenment's broken promises, ideological ideals, and utter instrumentalization. However, on the other hand, such disclosure of contradictions is hoped to pave the way for a revaluation of the notion and ideals of the Enlightenment—a rehabilitation of the notion of reason, however, hopefully now a non-profit oriented cause that is more self-conscious of its promises and biases. I am by no means arguing that Habermas does not have the same or a similar revisionist notion of reason in mind. As a matter of fact, I do consider his attempt to salvage reason from miscommunication, more than he is perhaps willing to admit, as revisionist, inasmuch as he wants to locate the activity of reason in concrete human communication; in this sense, he shares with Adorno an immanent model of

reason, as opposed to a transcendent model. Moreover, I think that this attempt to revise reason, to salvage it from the pitfalls of instrumental reason, is largely conditioned by the negative experience of the wrong state of things and not simply for the sake of theory alone. At times, Habermas sounds like he is basing the normativity of social critique solely on the viability of the theoretical framework employed, its communicability or lack of contradictions. While method is important, it is, however, dangerously reductive to ground normativity solely on it. As such, it would appear as if Habermas is blaming Adorno (also Nietzsche and the rest of the poststructuralists) as being responsible for the utterly reified state of our socio-politic-economic life. I am, of course, not endorsing this claim, and I am sure that a good Habermasian would agree with me that reification is a phenomenon bigger than our academic or theoretical enterprises. However, it is precisely the disdainful tone of Habermas' engagement with Adorno and the poststructuralists that invites critics to see his method as utterly formalistic. To my mind, the upshot of putting Adorno at the far extreme and in opposition to what Habermas regards as critical theory at its best—communicative action—results in the unfortunate scenario of battling for theoretical leverage, a situation that is counterintuitive to the aims of any critical theory of society, for it ends up in the hypostatization of one method over another, thereby freezing or paralyzing critique in front of unprecedented crises.

The aim of the above discussion of a radicalization of Kantian ambivalence is to show that it is possible to conceive ambivalence as a necessary component of reason. One could, so to speak, further inflect from this basic assumption for the purpose of citing its significance for a revaluation of critical theory. For instance, one could argue that ambivalence could equip reason with the proper attitude in confronting crises, in the sense that reason follows a middle route between the extremes of skepticism and enthusiasm or, to put it another way, between nihilism and blind religion. In this context, reason's ambivalence could be regarded as its receptivity to the non-identical: an affirmative reconfiguration of our concepts to better accommodate the new. Adorno and Horkheimer warn that any form of theoretical undertaking makes itself susceptible to instrumental reason and that the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* serves as a harsh reminder that the dogmatism of philosophy, or any kind of thinking for that matter, is rendered in the actualization of its tendency towards formalization. In contrast, Habermas seems to not worry about the problem of formalization and he is quite resolved to the view that there are "valid claims," on the one hand, and "invalid" or "power motivated claims," on the other, and that these distinctions are clear as long as we are able to *create* an "ideal speech situation" where we could lay down our cards fair and square. But by insisting on this formalized model of communication or "consensus," even if his proposal of an ideal speech situation is a counterfactual

assumption, something inherent in the communicative exchange is not given proper attention. What is ignored is the impossibility of assuming a pure, non-domineering, language employed in the process of deliberation. Against the backdrop of any deliberation is the plurality of possible and actual, necessarily conflicting, value systems; and even if the “final agreement” reached by deliberation could be rationality defended, it is far from the consensus on values (or the fair representation of each individual participant), but, rather, ends up in the standardization of interests that are not receptive to the plurality or peculiarity of cultural differences. Moreover, the formalization of deliberation ends up ignoring a deeper source of social conflict, that is, that beyond conflicts of interests, the more affective, and often politically dangerous, source of conflicts is the dogged opposition in our worldviews and moral ideals. Furthermore, by reducing our cognitive field to deliberation, we unwittingly neglect the reality of the non-human objects of the world, or the world as a whole. In recent years, there has been a growing interest in extra-human issues or what are usually referred to as “environment issues” and “animal rights”; this phenomenon is driven by the dialectical interplay between the advocates (environmentalists, animal rights advocates, etc.) and domestic and foreign policy makers (politicians, entrepreneurs, etc.). However, such issues are largely decided upon via formal deliberations on the side of the policy makers. In contrast, if the advocates decide to make their messages clear, they often resort to extra-

deliberative and even partisan measures. The danger which a formalized model of communicative deliberation would have to inevitably face is the persistence of interests motivated by value-free science, political power, and consumerism. This is precisely the point of Adorno and Horkheimer: that it would be difficult to conceive of communication that would not be tainted by the reification of modern life, on account of the persistence of value-free science, political power, and consumerism—interests which have monopolized our conception of the rational. Moreover, insisting on a formalized deliberative model would raise the question of whether all forms of value-driven ideals and norms, which each of us is affectively connected one way or the other, are necessarily ideological and, hence, proto-fascist.

The point of Adorno and Horkheimer's "unmasking" or "disclosing" critique is that, since we are affectively connected to our value judgments, the distinction between valid and invalid claims would not be apparent to us as easily as Habermas wants us to believe. The question should be asked at this juncture: If Adorno and Horkheimer are reluctant to accept a formalized deliberative model of communication, are they totally rejecting the possibility of rational discourse? As pointed out earlier, it is not reason *per se* that Adorno and Horkheimer are against, but, rather, the tendency of reason at forfeiting its very own intentions or reason's pathological path towards domination:

By sacrificing thought, which in its reified form as mathematics, machinery, organization, avenges itself on a humanity forgetful of it, enlightenment forfeited its own realization. By subjecting everything particular to its discipline, it left the uncomprehended whole free to rebound as mastery over things against the life and consciousness of human beings. But true praxis capable of overturning the status quo depends on theory's refusal to yield to the oblivion in which society allows thought to ossify (*DE* 33).

We can unpack a series of three interrelated pronouncements that are quite instructive. First, it is clear that Adorno and Horkheimer direct their critique against the forfeiture of Enlightenment reason's own realization, that is to say, that the self-undermining of Enlightenment reason is immanent within the structure of Enlightenment itself (a notion of immanence which Habermas seems to ignore), which is partly due to its failure of self-understanding and, hence, a failure of curbing its inclination towards reification. Second, that Enlightenment reason enters a pathological turn when, at the expense of mimetic experience, it ceases to be a reconciliation with outer nature and becomes a fetishized "mastery over things" through which particulars are subsumed under universalized organizing control. Here enlightenment reason turns into instrumental reason that infiltrates the social life-world to an increasing degree, and whose systematic and protean manipulation of cultural life has found ways of immunizing itself from critique via the commodification of potential forms of resistance such as the

artwork. Third, Adorno and Horkheimer give us a signal as to how we could “practically” respond to the problem of the reification of thought and thought’s domination of nature: thinking’s refusal, in the body of theoretical practice, to yield to the ossifying tendency of instrumental reason. What is at stake here is the shift in the self-understanding of the enlightenment project itself—reason’s shift from the “mastery over things” to the “mastery over reason” itself. Kantian ambivalence and Adornoian mimesis are promising starting points for reason’s self-understanding; they clear up the space for the necessary shift from instrumentalization to reconciliation, the rehabilitation of our receptivity to the non-identical features of experience or, in the light of the above discussion of cultural values and non-human being, our receptivity to cultural difference and the extra-human. How this is possible in more practical terms is, of course, another story; and while Habermas might be correct in saying that the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* does not offer us a clear course of action in actually dealing with the crisis of reason,⁷³ he, nevertheless, ends up overreacting to the claims made by

⁷³ As a response to the charge of non-action, Adorno remarks in a 1969 interview with the German magazine *Der Spiegel*: “In response to the question ‘What is to be done?,’ I usually can only answer ‘I do not know.’ I can only analyze relentlessly what is. In the process, I am reproached in the following manner: ‘If you criticize, you have to say how to do better.’ But I consider this a bourgeois prejudice. Historically, there have been countless instances in which precisely those works that pursued purely theoretical intentions altered consciousness and, by extension, societal reality.” “Who’s Afraid of the Ivory Tower? A Conversation with Theodore W. Adorno,” trans. by Gerhard Richter, in *Monatshefte*, 94:1 (2002), 16. In addition, in a short essay published the same year, Adorno directly addresses the problem of the relation between praxis and thinking. He emphatically defends the importance of thinking in the face of crisis and suppression and how thinking resists the

Adorno and Horkheimer. A theory of communicative action, regardless of its own theoretical difficulties, is, arguably, a valid response to the crisis of reason unmasked by the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*; and there are several commentators who offer convincing cases that indeed a *rapprochement* between Habermas and Adorno is possible.⁷⁴ However, this possibility of *rapprochement* is commonly unexplored primarily due to Habermas' way of staging his own position: by making the dubious move of squaring off his own theory with the ideology critique offered by Adorno and Horkheimer

tyranny of praxis gone wrong, that is, "absolutized praxis," citing the historical events in Russia during the period. See "Resignation," 166.

⁷⁴ Jay, for example, writes with regard to what is revealed in Habermas' critique of Adorno's performative contradiction: "... the incontrovertible examples that we do have in everyday life of such happy outcomes may perhaps be seen as the prefigural traces of the more utopian possibility Habermas, despite all his reservations about redemptive utopias, has never fully abandoned. Our dogged tendency to see tensions, conflicts, and aporias as contradictions amenable to resolution, rather than mere epiphenomena of an externally exterior linguistic system of heterological infrastructures or tropic displacements, bears witness to the irradicability of this hope." *Force Fields: Between Intellectual History and Cultural Critique*, 37. Another one is Rick Roderick, who remarks that the response of the early Habermas to the crisis of rationality diagnosed in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* was more sympathetic to Adorno and Horkheimer. For the early Habermas, a healthy response to the seeming negativity of the early Frankfurt School is by picking up the pieces of the dialectic and to rebuild it on a broader and firmer base while bearing in mind the warning made by Adorno and Horkheimer. See *Habermas and the Foundations of Critical Theory* (London: Macmillan, 1986). 60-61. A more recent account of the compatibility between Habermas and the early Frankfurt School, Adorno in particular, is offered by Romand Coles, where he argues that Adorno provides a more interesting and promising critical position than Habermas recognizes. Coles concludes his essay by arguing that Adorno's notion of non-identity is a promising way of construing a "dialogical ethic that seeks to articulate a respect for others through an agonistic generous receptivity." Although Coles is critical of Habermas and calls for an overcoming of the "constraints and pressures of communication," that is a going beyond the limitations of the Habermasian position, a possible *rapprochement* could be arrived at between Adorno's dialogical stance and a communication theory that reevaluates itself and accommodates instances of linguistic ambiguity, the prolix, the paradoxical, and the oblique. "Identity and Difference in the Ethical Positions of Adorno and Habermas," 40-41. Stefan Müller-Doohm also discusses the continuities between early critical theory and recent debates in the Frankfurt School in his "How to criticize? Convergent and divergent paths in critical theories of society," in *Handbook of Contemporary European Social Theory* (London: Routledge, 2006), 171-184.

and by ignoring the promise of the mimetic moment, he deprives critical theory of the critical potential of a social critique that is more comprehensive than a formalized model of deliberation. In turn, a protracted academic polemic, a battle for theoretical leverage, which ends up obfuscating, quite ironically, the practical motives of critical theory, by which I mean here to say the practical *confidence* of critique.

Chapter Six: Disclosing Critique and the Renewal of Critical Theory

Recent debates in and on the Frankfurt School tradition, especially on the relation between early critical theory and Habermas, have tended towards a more affirmative reconsideration of the contributions of the early critical theorists. Perhaps the most important among the texts that have come out in recent years (certainly important for our purposes here) are Axel Honneth's essay "The Possibility of a Disclosing Critique of Society" and Nikolas Kompridis' recent book *Critique and Disclosure*.⁷⁵ Both texts are, in their own specific ways, presented as timely reflections or self-reflections of the current and uncertain state of the intellectual tradition initiated by the early Frankfurt School—"in light of current debates in social criticism" (Honneth) and the fate of the tradition "between past and future" (Kompridis). The focus of Honneth's essay is more specific, as it offers a rereading of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, a book which "has scarcely lost any of its topicality" (PDC 49). Meanwhile, Kompridis proposes a possible renewal of the tradition via a reactivation of otherwise weakened utopian energies by revisiting the "suppressed" romantic elements of critical theory (CD 274-280). In more ways than one, both Honneth and Kompridis respond to and go beyond Habermas' rebuke of the early Frankfurt School.

⁷⁵ Axel Honneth, "The Possibility of a Disclosing Critique of Society: The *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in Light of Current Debates in Social Criticism," in *Disrespect: The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 49-62; Nikolas Kompridis, *Critique and Disclosure: Critical Theory between Past and Future* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2006).

However, the real novelty of these texts, and in spite of Kompridis' sometimes harsh criticism of Honneth, is their special attention to the philosophical or critical import of "disclosure" which has been repressed, along with critical theory's Romantic elements. We could understand disclosure as, first, an appropriation of the Heideggerian notion of *Erschlossenheit* (disclosedness), denoting the opening up of horizons of intelligibility or new aspects of such horizons to the understanding; second, as "disclosing critique" or "critical disclosure," which is the thematizing of the aspects of the disclosed horizons of possibility. As we have seen in the preceding chapter, Habermas downplays the role of the aesthetic in human reason, which is also to say that, in spite of his being a Kantian, he does not pay attention to the Kantian emphasis on the aesthetic dimension of reason, which was otherwise taken up by the early German Romantics. In contrast to Habermas, by inquiring into the possibility of disclosing critique, both Honneth and Kompridis offer us a more sincere and compelling reappraisal of the real legacy of the Frankfurt School. It is a legacy which has not, despite strong criticisms, lost touch with the "wrong state of things" and, as such, could not be more topical. Kompridis, in particular, recast the critical theory legacy as a form of philosophical discourse which considers incumbent upon itself the normative force of the "new," that is, of how critical theory as a philosophical tradition self-reflectively confronts its own crisis and the crises enveloping society. I have to note, however, that I am

not simply bringing together the accounts of Honneth and Kompridis without being mindful of their considerable differences.⁷⁶ For instance, Kompridis takes issue with the employment of “medical” terminology in social criticism, most especially on the use of “social pathology,” one of Honneth’s key terms, in describing internal anomalies in social reality.⁷⁷ Kompridis’ worry is based on his assumption that the medicalization of critique is nothing short of assuming a normative stance wherein the social critic specifies a “social analogue of normality and health” which can be the formal, and hence fixed, basis for a “universalistic ethic of the good life.”⁷⁸ In addition, such a medical-normative stance provides the social critic the privileged position of a quasi-physician who can feign the objective validity of his or her diagnosis. It appears that Kompridis is warning us against the possible dogmatic turn that could ensue from the epistemic privilege that comes with the medicalization of the language of critique. He, therefore, proposes to instead use terms such as “crisis” or “breakdown” since they are not burdened with “connotations of sickness and abnormality.”⁷⁹ While Kompridis’ point is stated clearly enough—and I am predisposed to accept his warning against universalism and dogmatism—notwithstanding the danger involved in the over-medicalization of the language of philosophy (as

⁷⁶ See, for instance, Kompridis’ penetrating critique of Honneth’s recognition theory in “From Reason to Self-Realisation? Axel Honneth and the ‘Ethical Turn’ in Critical Theory,” in *Critical Horizons*, 5 (2004), 323-360.

⁷⁷ See *ibid.*, 337-344 and also CD 273.

⁷⁸ Kompridis, “From Reason to Self-Realisation?,” 338.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 341.

both Foucault and Deleuze have also shown us), I still think that he overstates the possible danger in using medical terms. They are, after all, used as metaphors that could re-describe social phenomena and, hence, disclose realities missed by ordinary language. With Honneth's use of the term "pathology," I think that he uses it in a benign manner: the original Greek sense of "analyzing suffering." Human suffering is, after all, at the center of debates in social criticism. My focus, however, is not on this minor point. Whether we use "crisis," "breakdown," or "pathology," we are still referring to something which requires our critical attention: all three terms entail that something is "wrong" or "anomalous." The persistence of social suffering is certainly an important standpoint for Adorno, one which could be regarded as the normative ground from which the need for a critical theory of society could be repeatedly justified.⁸⁰ While Kompridis' critique of Honneth perhaps merits a study in itself, I would like to take a different and a more constructive path, that is, by bringing together their respective accounts of the critical potential of world disclosure. But as opposed to identifying the two, my aim is rather to make more prominent the potent notion of disclosing critique by reinforcing Honneth's account with that of Kompridis. The result is, therefore, a synthesized version of disclosing critique. In the following, I will present a schematic reconstruction of the

⁸⁰ See, for example, the arguments offered by J.M. Bernstein in his "Suffering Injustice: Misrecognition as Moral Injury in Critical Theory," in *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 13:3 (2005), 303-324.

basic claims of Honneth and Kompridis in order to show that their efforts lead us to a healthier, by which I mean more philosophically enriching, response to the Frankfurt School tradition, contra the response of Habermas. It is hoped that by elucidating on the notion of disclosing critique, I could make more sense of the Nietzsche-Adorno relation in Part Three of this study.

A. Disclosing Social Pathologies

For Honneth, the key to the proper appropriation of the early Frankfurt School depends on the *best* possible way of understanding the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. He identifies three successive phases of its reception which have led to the book's current status. The first phase was of those "models of historical distancing" which, although convincing enough to pinpoint the historical exactness of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as a work born out of the experience of Nazism and Stalinism, see the book as anachronistic and thus could not adequately face up to the new challenges laid out for social philosophy (*PDC* 49). The second phase departs from the first by ignoring the book's historical context and, rather, admonishes the cogency of the book's scientific modes of explanation. Critics of the second phase argue that the narrative of the book does not satisfactorily, that is to say scientifically, establish the relation between our inner psychical instincts and actual forms of social domination (*PDC* 50). Apart from the lack of scientific evidence, the philosophical soundness of the book was also

eventually questioned during the third round of discussion, wherein critics expressed their fear of the dangerous political implications of the book (*PDC* 50).⁸¹ These three phases, of course, successively build up the general reception of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, at least up until the publication of Honneth's paper. It is instructive to trace the timeline of the reception of the book for a couple of reasons. First, it shows how Habermas' (and also the early Honneth's) critique could be seen to be the culmination of these phases. Second, Honneth's schematic outline shows us that the reception of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is, arguably, synonymous with the general reception of early critical theory. Hence, what these two reasons imply is that attempting to rescue early critical theory from unfair criticisms presupposes a response to Habermas' critique, which was already offered in the previous chapter, and a re-evaluative reading of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

However, beyond the political vilification of the book, a rather extreme response would be to aestheticize it (*PDC* 51). We have seen in the previous chapter that Habermas' reading of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is gleaned from both its political- and aesthetic appropriation, that is, that the

⁸¹ The following are cited by Honneth as participants in the debate in respect of the above-mentioned sequence of the debate: For the first round, Helmut Dubiel, *Wissenschaftsorganisation und politische Erfahrung: Studien zur frühen kritischen Theorie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978). For the second round, Wolfgang Bronß and Axel Honneth eds., *Sozialforschung als Kritik: Das sozialwissenschaftliche Potential der kritischen Theorie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982); Jessica Benjamin, "The End of Internalization: Adorno's Social Psychology," in *Telos*, 32 (1977), 42-ff; and Honneth, *Critique of Power*. The third round, Habermas, *The Political Discourse of Modernity*.

book is seen by Habermas as politically irresponsible because he sees it as an aestheticized tragic-history of Enlightenment reason without any positive provisions for practical solutions. In other words, Habermas dismisses the critical potential of the book and regards it as a dangerous literary piece that does not have anything worthwhile to contribute to critical theory on account of its having retreated from politics into cultural criticism and speculative philosophy. In contradistinction to Habermas' reading, Honneth's recent proposal could be read as an attempt to cut across the former's extreme interpretation and show that there is an alternative form of social criticism whose importance is largely ignored. A disclosing critique of society should be able to exhibit a clear and stern political and practical position, thereby withstanding political vilification and the charge of aestheticism. Habermas overstresses the difference between politics and culture, ignoring that fact that politics is itself cultural; that is, that it involves anthropomorphic moral valuations that are embedded deep within our socio-political practices. As a literary piece, the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* aims to re-describe social phenomena using visual and conceptual metaphors that are able to shed light on contradictions in our socio-political practices which are otherwise missed by conventional argumentation. According to Honneth, the normative basis of a disclosing critique is gleaned from its sensitivity to "falseness" or "wrongness" of certain social relations that compromise the possibility of a good life:

If we claim that a society's characteristic desires or interests have taken a wrong turn, or if we problematize the mechanisms by which they are generated, then we are implicitly defending the thesis that a given set of social relations had violated the conditions which constitute a necessary presupposition for the good life (*PDC* 56).

The normative standard for a disclosing critique is, therefore, a utopian image of the good life. In this context, a disclosing critique of society functions as an *eyewitness* to the anomalous or pathological formation of certain social relations that damage, that is to say contradict, the utopian image of a good life; such a damaging effect, more importantly, manifests itself in psychological and physical terms. Through this *eyewitness* account, what is actually disclosed is the wrong state of things: that, despite the fact that modern society promises social configurations—i.e., institutions that secure social justice and freedom—these same social configurations could morph into new systematic ways of oppression, thereby defeating their very own purpose. As Honneth writes:

For even under institutional conditions that secure individual autonomy and thus guarantee value pluralism, everyone's value preferences can develop jointly in a direction that seems to at least some of us to be incompatible with the presuppositions of a good life. Nor can it be ruled out in principle that in the name of liberty we have allowed institutional mechanisms to emerge whose influence on our own interests or claims we cannot find acceptable (*PDC* 56).

With the above passage, social pathology could mean the *complexification* of social relations which could, for instance, happen when a value preference (race, gender, social class, ideology, etc.) of a particular social or political group evolves to be more dominant than others which could result in the oppressive marginalization of other groups, directly or indirectly. As such, a society evolves pathologically when the very principles that promise the possibility of a good life—freedom, liberty, democracy, equal opportunity—become the very basis of their obverse. Honneth, moreover, tackles the problem of defining social pathology by examining previous attempts by social philosophers in diagnosing social anomalies. According to Honneth, against the backdrop of the disclosure of social pathologies is an implicit “paradigm of social normality” or some sort of “ethical background” that conditions “a well-lived” life, that is, a life of “undistorted self-realization.”⁸² The realization of undistorted self-realization, Honneth adds, “is constituted by the social living conditions of individual subjects . . . oriented towards the well-being of individuals, inasmuch as this well-being exists within the framework of what is socially feasible.”⁸³ We must take into account that Honneth does not regard this notion of social normality or precondition for self-realization in universalist terms, but, rather, in the specific and concrete social conditions of a given

⁸² Axel Honneth, “Pathologies of the Social: The Past and Present of Social Philosophy,” in *Disrespect: The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*, 34-37.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 37.

society, which means that there are as many specific social conditions as there are as many societies; the specificity of a given set of social conditions is linked to the mores of a the specific culture. Honneth observes that the formulation of a social philosophy is largely contingent upon the specific social conditions within which the particular theorist reflected. As such, a social theorist, depending on the social conditions of his day, may approach the problem of social pathology in either an individualist (Rousseau, Plessner) or communitarian (Hegel , Arendt) light.⁸⁴ The important point that Honneth makes is that the ethical background from which the diagnosis of social pathology depends is normatively grounded in a given society's specific practices, which also explains that the varying, sometimes conflicting, solutions are also normatively grounded in these practices. The following passage from Honneth is instructive:

The question then becomes crucial whether it is a communitarian form of ethical life, a distance-creating public sphere, non-alienated labor or a mimetic interaction with nature that enables individuals to lead a well-lived life. We can summarize by saying that the determination of social pathologies in social philosophy always proceeds with a view to the social conditions that promote the individual's self-realization. The fact that a whole spectrum of highly diverse standards of evaluation is nevertheless revealed as soon as these approaches are compared with one another is not related to differences in

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 36-37. It is interesting to note that Honneth takes his notion of social contingency from Nietzsche: "... after Nietzsche's look at the existing pluralism of cultures led him to draw the radical conclusion that all truth is perspectival, social philosophy could no longer persist in such a state of self-certainty." *Ibid.*, 38.

formal-ethical perspective but to the respective foundational concept of personal self-realization.⁸⁵

The recognition of social pathologies, therefore, rests against the backdrop of an ethical imperative that conditions the possibility of undistorted self-realization. The blockage or distortion of self-realization, in this context, is considered a social pathology. The immanent recognition of social complexities which block self-realization—that is to say, complexities that cause the suffering of individuals and groups—strikes an ethical chord within us and, in turn, bring us to a reconsideration of utopian energies which are either repressed or damaged by what transpires in the current state of a given society. It could bring us to a realization that will change the way we perceive reality. Honneth believes that the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

. . . satisfies the methodological demands of this alternative form of social criticism by opening new horizons of meaning within which it can show the extent to which given social relations have a pathological character (*PDC* 51).

Honneth argues that a critical diagnosis of social pathologies is necessary if we are to maintain a “therapeutic self-critique,” by which he means the intention of disclosing critique to evoke, instead of rationally justifying, normative judgments within the readers themselves (*PDC* 57). While for Habermas the skeptical exaggeration of opinion rendered in the book spells the weakness of its authors’ methodology, on the contrary,

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

within the context of disclosing critique, such a performative gesture is considered the strength of critical diagnosis: “by presenting such a radically new description of social living conditions,” disclosing critique leads the reader to an acquisition of a “new meaning of a pathological condition” (PDC 57). The implied logic behind this is that there is an inextricable relation between our value systems and the actual world we live in. The mutual dependency between our values and social reality play off each other, that is to say, that they influence one another.⁸⁶ This logic is, of course, shared by social and political theories other than critical disclosure, what makes critical disclosure different is that it paves the way to alternative descriptions of our socio-political lifeworld; the expected result is the recognition and thematic reflection of otherwise neglected aspects of our socio-political lifeworld. Such revelation via alternative hermeneutic routes would recast our understanding of our normative practices which would then “provide us with a standard for criticizing social circumstances.”⁸⁷ The disclosure of social pathologies, that is to say, the radical re-descriptions of social reality, according to Honneth, “alter our view of it fundamentally and change our value beliefs in the process” (PDC 57). *Seeing or witnessing,*

⁸⁶ Here Honneth invokes Hilary Putnam’s thesis, “that a relation of mutual dependency exists between the real world and our values. . . . how we are able to perceive reality is dependent upon our value beliefs, just as these value beliefs cannot be formed independently of the manner in which we actually perceive reality” (PDC 57). See also Chapter 6 of Putnam’s *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

⁸⁷ Honneth, “Pathologies of the Social: The Past and Present of Social Philosophy,” 38.

therefore, plays a key role in disclosing critique, for judging whether a social reality is unacceptable is conditioned by the act of witnessing which, in turn, conditions the act of reflection. This empirico-reflective process functions not as a mere presentation of the correspondence between opinion and fact, but, rather, strives to amend our commonly held beliefs about society at large. The intention of disclosing critique is not to shatter our lives, but to shatter our commonly held belief systems which hem in and stabilize our perceptual paradigms, preventing us from witnessing the shattering reality of social anomalies. The experience of wreckage, of crisis and uncertainty, becomes, as it were, the ontological basis of hope, of the reactivation of utopian energies.

In contrast to traditional social criticism, Honneth highlights two important peculiarities of disclosing critique: 1) its sensitivity to the role of language and 2) its indirect relation to the truth it evokes (*PDC* 57-58). The emendation of commonly held beliefs about social reality is linguistically-based, but one which goes beyond the logic of traditional rational justification and proceduralist models of communication. What is unwittingly dissimulated or abandoned in formalist or proceduralist models of language is the rhetorical/metaphorical/figurative or, as Adorno puts it, the “mimetic” dimension of language. While, on the one hand, formalists and proceduralists tend to purge communication of its mimetic elements, disclosing critique, on the other hand, considers these mimetic or evocative

expressions to be effective ways of leading us to radical revelations of social pathologies. However, such pathologies, if we consider them as factual or true in the sense that they do happen and we experience them directly or indirectly, could only be presented as pathologies indirectly or mimetically. Disclosing critique is aware of the fact that there are instances when purely logical or procedural expressions, because of their tendency to reduce social phenomena to sets of acceptable propositions, cannot grasp the complexity of social realities, and thereby lack the ability to effect changes in opinion. Honneth writes: “If it is the function of a disclosing critique of society is to change our value beliefs by evoking a new way of seeing the social world, then this critique cannot directly raise a truth claim for its rhetorically conveyed assertions” (*PDC* 58). Honneth distinguishes between “rhetorical persuasion” (*Überredung*) and “argumentative persuasion” (*Überzeugung*). The truth arrived at through rhetorical persuasion is indirect and can only be assessed after the effect. This implies that rhetorical persuasion is more dialectical than argumentative persuasion in the sense that it involves the direct experience of pathologies or the indirect experience of these pathologies through the metaphors employed—like watching a movie or reading a novel where the reader gets, unconsciously or not, entangled within the constellation of meanings which evokes a response. What is implicitly communicated through mimetic imagery is the ethical character of

knowledge, that redemption presupposes a radicalized view of knowledge; social justice arises out of knowledge itself and how knowledge is put to use.

So, with the employment of several rhetorical devices—like the Odysseus myth, chiasmus, and exaggeration—the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, according to Honneth, is able to produce a narrative that compels us to experience the banal and familiar as monstrously strange, thereby producing a disturbing effect on us. This characterization is obviously very different from the early Honneth's observation in *The Critique of Power*, where he simply read the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as articulating a grand philosophy of history that externally and ineffectively accounted for the material conditions of social domination.⁸⁸ By deviating from his original claim, Honneth offers us a more convincing explanation of the critical import of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, a critical impulse based on the acknowledgment of the contingent nature of understanding and that such understanding is inextricably conditioned by the perpetual impossibility of accounting for all there is to know about social reality. Critical disclosure recognizes the fact that the contingency of understanding itself exists within a layer of the social matrix; as such, contingency is immanent within all interpretations of social reality. What a disclosing critique contributes is a way of reading social reality that is "critical" precisely because it endeavors to amend our common ways of seeing the social sphere. So, more than simply restructuring social

⁸⁸ See Honneth, *The Critique of Power*, 53 and 55.

institutions, critical theory in the body of disclosing critique digs deeper into the problem: it reveals the falsified way we look at society which is conditioned by the wrong state of things. The ubiquity of this situation—brought about by the culture industry’s standardization and deformation of our normative standards—weakens our critical impulse and, based on critical disclosure, regaining a critical stance could only be done indirectly. Based on this reading, the procedure employed by Adorno and Horkheimer, even if Honneth ironically thinks that they end up defending a truth claim they could not guarantee, succeeds in redescribing social reality in such a manner that we become aware, to some degree, of social pathologies—such as, reification, alienation, fascism, nihilism, etc.—that are otherwise dissimulated by our conventional belief systems, including the traditional methods we employ to analyze these systems. The normative weight of critical disclosure is, therefore, not in the justification of definite and unquestionable “idealizations,” but in the “recognition of contingency”⁸⁹ which functions both as a critical force and a corrective measure against the solidification of our perceptual apparatuses. Ultimately, on another level,

⁸⁹ Albrecht Wellmer distinguishes two contrasting tendencies in recent philosophy which comprise the current embodiment of the opposition between “absolutism” and “relativism” or, as Wellmer puts it, “the antinomy of truth”: the tendency to posit a non-metaphysical basis of correct standards, right criteria, or objective truth (with Putnam, Apel, and Habermas as likely proponents), on the one hand, and the problematization of our truth claims from the standpoint of “contingency” (represented, according to Wellmer, by Rorty, but, we may add Adorno and Nietzsche as well). See *Endgames: The Irreconcilable Nature of Modernity, Essays and Lectures*, trans. by David Midgley (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1998), 137-154.

this normative weight of critical disclosure—its openness to contingency—is precisely what motivates it towards change. In a word, changing the way we perceive social reality, albeit necessarily painful and uncertain, could lead to the eventual “change” that we hope for the social world.

B. Reviving the Mimetic Impulse: The Practice of Reflective Disclosure

One could say, for the sake of argument, that Kompridis’ *Critique and Disclosure* follows on the possibility opened up by Honneth’s rereading of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. As I have noted above, a reconsideration of the critical force of the collaborative work is nothing short of a reappraisal of the contribution of early critical theory in current debates in social criticism. We should remember that the theme of disclosure resurfaced in Honneth’s work via his rereading of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*; he directly perceives the disclosing potential of the book and asserts that it is precisely the very structure of the book, the rhetorical devices employed, that makes it an effective tool for disclosure. Meanwhile, although Kompridis does not offer an exclusive treatment of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, he does have something very important to say about the book in relation to disclosing critique, again contra Habermas, which could very well complement that of Honneth. Kompridis questions the Habermasian view that the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* results in an insuperable impasse on account of the book’s putative skeptical stance. In contrast to this reading, Kompridis remarks: “It could be argued that at the very least it was an authentic critical response to

the times in which they lived, a response that is possible if and when one lets oneself be affected by historical experience" (CD 257). This openness to historical experience or the ability to be affected by historical circumstances Kompridis calls "receptivity." He also refers to receptivity as a kind of "mindedness" that requires "exposure to human vulnerability—the vulnerability of a being that can be 'marked,' 'struck,' 'impressed' by experience, by what it encounters in the world" (CD 206). Kompridis emphatically reminds us, however, that receptivity is by no means the same as "passivity" or the mindless acquiescence to what is. On the contrary, receptivity requires our active participation or "accountability." This accountability could be explained through our acknowledgement of the "other" which requires an act of self-decentralization: "We *allow* ourselves to be affected by experience, *allow* ourselves to be decentered" (CD 206).⁹⁰

Kompridis further writes:

Receptivity facilitates discovery and self-discovery, since it enables movement from an old to a new understanding ("I arrive there")—enables the enlargement of the realm of possibility, and, at the same time, a transformation of sensibility (CD 206).

⁹⁰ Kompridis provides an example of accountability: "It is not uncommon to be reproached either in the intimate sphere (by a friend, spouse, lover, or child) or in the public sphere (by members of minority or subaltern cultures who feel marginalized or misrecognized) for not listening. When this familiar reproach is uttered—"You're not listening!"—we are not being reproached for an acoustical failure; we are being reproached for being unreceptive, for failing to put ourselves in a position to judge justly the rightness or wrongness of some claim. And that failure is a consequence of failing to register as need for acknowledgment, whose register is a precondition of just judgment. Above all, we are reproached for rendering voiceless someone with whom we claim to share a life, leaving them bereft (even if only temporarily) of the power of appeal" (CD 208).

So, apropos to Honneth's observation that disclosure aims to amend our commonly held beliefs, our receptivity to the particularity and plurality of our experiences affects the way we perceive these experiences; receptivity, then, is "the condition of seeing things differently, of being able to redisclose the world by drawing not from some source outside history but from a plurality of sources within it" (CD 257). We could say that it is this notion of receptivity that animates Kompridis' concept of disclosure, a concept which is profoundly informed by Heidegger's ontological idea of "world-disclosure."⁹¹ Kompridis summarizes this point in the following:

In *Being and Time* and in *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Heidegger argued that prior to confronting the world as though it were first and foremost a super object, or as though it were identical with nature, we operate 'always already' with a pre-reflective, holistically structured, and grammatically regulated *understanding* of the world. And so prior to establishing explicit epistemic relations to the world "out there," our theoretical understanding of the world always refers back to, as much as it draws upon, a concerned *practical* involvement with what we encounter in the world—a world we do not "constitute," but into which we are "thrown" (CD 33).

⁹¹ The following essays in *Thesis Eleven*, 37 (1994) directly deal with the appropriation of the Heideggerian notion of world-disclosure and its importance in contemporary hermeneutics and social critique: Nikolas Kompridis, "On World Disclosure: Heidegger, Habermas and Dewey," 29-45; Cristina Lafont, "World Disclosure and Reference," 46-63; Martin Seel, "On Rightness and Truth: Reflections on the Concept of World Disclosure," 64-81; and James Bohman, "World Disclosure and Radical Criticism," 82-97.

As an alternative to traditional representationalist epistemologies, Heidegger employs the Greek word “*aletheia*” (“disclosure”) to describe a kind of world-appropriation or understanding/acting/knowing that is “not yet truth,” but grants the possibility of knowing, or better yet “understanding,” the world: whereas the “world” is to be construed neither as a collection or amalgam of entities nor as an analogue of nature or cosmos, but, rather, as “that within which entities appear, a field of horizon ontologically grounded in a totality of assignment-relations”⁹² While accepting this pre-reflective aspect of disclosure, Kompridis takes it a step further by saying that these pre-reflective background relations are “reopened and transformed through novel interpretations and cultural practices,” otherwise referred to as “reflective disclosure” (CD 34).⁹³ Hence, what is necessarily involved in disclosure, according to Kompridis, are “both receptivity and activity, both openness to and engagement with, what is disclosed” (CD 34). Based on this view, the attunement to receptivity and activity—or in the case of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the ability to be affected by historical circumstances—could better respond to the

⁹² Stephen Mulhall, *Heidegger and Being and Time*, quoted by Kompridis in CD 34. See also Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), Section 44.

⁹³ Elsewhere, Kompridis writes: “*World disclosure* refers, with deliberate ambiguity, to a process which actually occurs at two different levels. At one level, it refers to the disclosure of an already interpreted, symbolically structured world; the world, that is, within which we always already *find* ourselves. At another level, it refers as much to the disclosure of new horizons of meaning as to the disclosure of previously hidden or unthematized dimensions of meaning.” “On World Disclosure: Heidegger, Habermas and Dewey,” 29.

problematics of “continuity and discontinuity, and crisis and renewal” (CD 31).

For Kompridis, the proper response to the problematic of continuity and discontinuity and crisis and renewal should be one that post-Habermasian critical theory should take seriously. There are some subtle aspects of social reality that proceduralist models could not grasp or properly articulate—for instance, the subtle differences in cultural practices, which involve not only language (English, German, French, Tagalog, etc.) but also religious and social norms peculiar to particular cultural groups or minorities. These subtle aspects of social reality (pathological or otherwise) could only be revealed when the language itself of the critical model employed (critical theory for instance) becomes more receptive to the contingency of its own language or constellation of explanatory devices and, hence, reflectively subjects its language to renewal. The success of the critical model depends both on its receptivity (its willingness to be affected by its object of critique) to the particularity of its object of critique and to its active (and consciously non-instrumental) employment of normative resources. This means that if we are faced with a crisis or a breakdown of some sort, our successful engagement with (or solution to) the problem involves both our ability to allow ourselves to be affected by experience (self-decentering) and our measured, yet non-instrumental, ability to take a stand. Kompridis notes that our “moral and cognitive dispositions enable and

constrain what we are receptive to: they can be transformed but not disabled by what we receive.” He also warns that the same moral and cognitive dispositions could also “impede or block receptivity, constrain more than they enable” (CD 208). Indeed, it is during times of crises (e.g., war) when our receptivity is ultimately tested; it is during times of crises when fundamentalists act as fundamentalists and progressives act as progressives or, strangely enough, when even progressives begin to unwittingly defend the platitudes of conservatives (e.g., the debates on just and preemptive war or the legitimization of torture by the US government). What is crucial for Kompridis, and ultimately crucial for the authors of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, is the necessity of a dialectical interaction between the contingency of experience and our moral and cognitive dispositions (normative resources) or, put another way, a dialectical play between our “sense of possibility” and “sense of responsibility” (CD 191). Language plays a very important role in this context, for it is through language that we *make sense* of what we *witness*. For, while language is the very horizon through which we normatively seal our responsibility or accountability, it is also through this horizon that possibilities present themselves to us. Broadening our linguistic horizon—which does not exactly mean learning other languages or dialects, but, rather, being more receptive to different forms of expression, e.g., literature, poetry, or art—renders us more spontaneously open to possibilities that we would otherwise miss if were

constricted by a narrow notion of communication. The world-disclosive model of language is, therefore, broader than the Habermasian model which is tailored to be validity-claiming and rule-governed. Nevertheless, I consider this as not so much creating a strict opposition between the Habermasian model and the disclosive model of language, albeit Kompridis sometimes sounds like he is making the strict opposition, but, rather, finding a balance between normativity and passivity. Language should be open enough to accommodate changes, but it should be firm enough for us to preserve our traditions or for us to take a stand: "If we are not open enough, we will be deaf to calls to change our language and our life; if we are too open, we will be unable to call our language and our life our own" (CD 211). In other words, society depends on the delicate balance between openness to the new and the continuity of tradition, that is, a dialectical play between continuity and discontinuity, and a healthy culture could not be otherwise. In a sense, the role of critical theory is not only to be receptive to this dialectical interplay, but also, in a way, to foster its continuous activity; and this is done when critique itself becomes the very locale of this dialectical interplay. Philosophy, in general, or critical theory, in particular, should always be mindful of the contingent nature of its language; for it is only when philosophy is receptive to the contingency of its language that it is able to "reflectively disclose" both its potentialities and shortcomings and, thereby, open up the possibility of correcting or reconstituting itself. This

basic element in the self-understanding of philosophy—basic, yet still is largely neglected in much professional philosophy today—is the main point that I hope Part One of this thesis amply addressed via Nietzsche and Adorno.

It is the notion of “reflective disclosure” that is most important for the renewal of critical theory. Reflective disclosure, based on the above discussion, emphasizes critique’s receptivity to the lessons of history and its ability to transform itself in response to crisis. But more than a *renewal*, Kompridis’ proposal, to my mind, is more a *revival* of a specific critical impulse that already exists in early critical theory (especially that of Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse) but shunned by Habermas’ communicative turn. Ironically, despite Habermas’ disdainful criticism of early critical theory, his strategy “discloses” rather than effectively downplays the contribution of the early critical theorists, especially Adorno’s. I am referring here to the notion of “mimesis” which, I argue, is closest to, and could be made the basis of, Kompridis’ idea of reflective disclosure. As we have seen in an earlier chapter, the notion of mimesis is used by the authors of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* to anthropologically explain our relation to nature—it could be said that the mimetic moment is the moment of our “receptivity to” or “reconciliation with” nature; because it is through this process that we allow nature to unfold itself. Mimesis, therefore, allows us to constitute the world we live in through a concept-generating apparatus we call language.

However, the pathological turn of mimesis (instrumental rationality), Adorno and Horkheimer argue, results in theoretical and practical excesses that are detrimental to our relation with nature. In other words, these excesses impede our receptivity to nature, depriving language of its disclosing potential. Nevertheless, it is also in mimesis that Adorno finds the emancipatory resources that resist the total reification of language and thought: receptivity to the non-conceptual, indeed to the non-identical. Kompridis himself provides us with the best explanation of the relation between mimesis and receptivity:

. . . the “subject” is engaged in a mimetic or receptive act through which it can encounter the “object” in nonobjectifying, noninstrumental way, putting itself in a position where it can see itself through the “object’s” eyes. . . . It requires receptivity, an opening up to the “object,” not bending back upon it, as to one more object of possible subsumption under a rule of one kind or another.

Approached in this way, the other can retain its “otherness,” but without becoming irretrievably, unapproachably “other” (CD 104).

This observation is, of course, based on Adorno’s reconceptualization of the subject-object relation, which I have partially dealt with in Chapter Three and I will get back to it in Chapter Eight. What Adorno proposes is a “disenchantment of the concept,” meaning the acknowledgment of the necessity of using concepts to make sense of reality while, at the same time, being aware that reality should not be reduced to mere concepts. What

concepts illustrate are, as pointed out in Chapter Three, non-conceptualities. If we follow Kompridis, then what reflective disclosure promises to do is precisely the possibility of thinking the non-conceptual or, as he puts it, the accessibility of “otherness” to the subject allows the subject to encounter itself “in a new, previously unforeseeable way” (CD 104). The aim of reflective disclosure, therefore, echoes the utopian aspiration we find in Adorno’s re-evaluative theory of language, which is nothing short of a revaluation of the aim of critical theory: its reorientation in history and the disclosure of uncharted constellations. Reflective disclosure, for Kompridis, enlarges our logical space; but this enlargement presupposes a revival of our confidence in language and in aesthetic experience, becoming more receptive both to its affirmativeness and negativity: “reconfiguring the inferential relationships that currently obtain so that we can make room for new ‘objects’” (CD 105).

PART THREE

REINSCRIBING THE NON-IDENTICAL

Chapter Seven: Genealogy: Nietzsche's Dialectic of Enlightenment

The significance of exploring the prospect of reflective disclosure is twofold: first, it allows us to see the possibility of revamping the practice of critical theory, described in the preceding chapter as critique's receptivity to the lessons of history and its ability to re-describe and reflect on social phenomena, thereby transforming the critical stance as it confronts crisis; second, recasting critical theory in light of critical disclosure permits a more explicit re-contextualization of Nietzsche's contribution to the rehabilitation of the critical stance—specifically, the role that Nietzschean genealogy plays in our revision of critical theory. This is crucial if the aim is the reorientation of critical theory to the Adornoian notion of the non-identical. This task is not without its difficulties and the recovery of the critical power of the non-identical presupposes reviving Adorno's engagement with the subject-object dialectic, which, in turn, presupposes a response to Habermas' denial of the subject-object dialectic's function in contemporary critical theory. By being more explicit about a Nietzschean contribution to critical theory, we are in a better position to revive the subject-object dialectic, while, at the same time, marking the convergences between Nietzsche and Adorno on the subject's reorientation to affective or aesthetic experience, that is, the subject's revival of the mimetic impulse understood as the somatic basis of human

experience. It will be shown that a revised subject-object dialectic that allows us a deeper understanding of the role of our bodies against the backdrop of our experience/creation of the world is the backbone of this study's main theme: the ethics of thinking.

In this particular chapter, the aforementioned explicit account of a specifically Nietzschean contribution to critical theory will be set out. In the first section, I draw on a recent essay by Axel Honneth, "Reconstructive Social Critique with a Genealogical Proviso: On the Idea of 'Critique' in the Frankfurt School," in order to demonstrate the Nietzschean dimension of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and to argue, with Honneth and against Habermas, that any form of critical theory should seriously take into consideration the disclosive potential of Nietzschean genealogy. This corroborates Honneth's claim, discussed in Chapter Six, that the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is best understood as a world-disclosing text on account of its genealogical methodology, that is, as a pathogenesis of reification. The second section of the chapter is an elaboration of the genealogical method's relation to immanent critique. I argue that genealogy renders history intelligible by providing a critical tool that can penetrate the crevices that bring together both historical "continuity" and "discontinuity." Genealogy and critical theory converge since they are motivated by the breaking down of our contemporary self-understanding and they both seek to explain the present crisis of self-understanding.

A. Genealogy as Critical Disclosure

When Adorno and Horkheimer refer to Nietzsche as one of the few after Hegel to have recognized the dialectic of Enlightenment, they are putting forward a very important observation that proves to be crucial for the main argument of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. More than a turn of phrase, the mention of Nietzsche prefigures the basic temperament of the book; it is, therefore, not accidental that Nietzsche is the most cited thinker in the text. But to be more specific, they have found in the works of Nietzsche an alternative critical-narrative tool—the “genealogical” presentation of his critique of morality—that does not only counter the conventional metanarrative of the Enlightenment project (the unitary and logical progress of reason) but one which “discloses” the catastrophic path that Enlightenment reason has taken. So, while Hegel provided Adorno and Horkheimer with a basic framework from which to construct an overarching dialectical philosophy of history, it is actually Nietzsche who provides the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* its critical spirit: “He formulated the ambivalent relationship of enlightenment to power” (DE 36). Nietzsche’s genealogical strategy, his critical historiography, offered a way of narrating and interpreting the dynamics of instrumental reason using a model that was starkly different, and deliberately so, from the methods prescribed by traditional philosophy: argumentation in terms of logic, identity, cause and effect, telos, or progress. What I wish to claim, at least at this juncture, is that

the idiosyncratic method employed in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* resembles and can be best understood with reference to Nietzschean genealogy. Notwithstanding the fact that Adorno and Horkheimer present seemingly contradictory versions of Nietzsche in the book, especially when one juxtaposes "Excursus I: Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment" and "Excursus II: Juliette or Enlightenment and Morality," they, nonetheless, perform a profoundly Nietzschean gesture, that of displaying an immanent tension within the text. In effect, they bring forth a Nietzsche that is both a *challenge* to and *culmination* of the Enlightenment, both a formidable, sometimes repulsive, adversary (as Habermas evidently thinks) and also a noteworthy representative of Enlightenment thinking.

In a recent essay, "Reconstructive Social Critique with a Genealogical Proviso: On the Idea of 'Critique' in the Frankfurt School," Honneth advances a bold claim that frustrates, more than anything else, the Habermasian perspective on Nietzschean genealogy and early critical theory. Honneth observes that the works of the early members of the Frankfurt School (especially Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse) should be seen as a synthesis of Hegel and Nietzsche. Honneth notes that the original Left Hegelianism/Marxism of the early Frankfurt School provided them with a somewhat optimistic conception of social critique grounded in the

immanent criticism of society.¹ This optimism, Honneth maintains, was subject to doubt in the wake of the traumatic events of Nazism and Stalinism, forcing the early Frankfurt School members, now as exiles, to fundamentally reconsider the Marxist framework both as a sound social critique and as a political temperament. While the most convincing elements of Hegel's philosophy were maintained, the crushing experience of fascism resulted in a loss of confidence in the Marxist project; this too, as in the case of Horkheimer and Adorno, resulted in a poignant totalizing critique of the pitfalls of the Enlightenment project that is putatively (and mistakenly) regarded by their critics as sheer pessimism. From the 1930s onwards, Honneth writes, "Critical Theory underwent a systematic convergence with Nietzsche's genealogy. For in their best parts, his moral and psychological writings anticipate precisely the theoretical misgivings that the Frankfurters developed in exile."² Honneth adds that this convergence was not simply a displacement of the Frankfurt School's original Hegelian program, but, rather, "they built genealogy into their reconstructive model as a kind of metacritical standpoint."³ While Habermas himself acknowledges this genealogical turn in the Frankfurt School, we have seen in a previous chapter that he dismisses the importance of Nietzsche's influence on Adorno and

¹ See Axel Honneth, "Reconstructive Social Critique with a Genealogical Proviso: On the Idea of 'Critique' in the Frankfurt School," in *Pathologies of Reason: On the Legacy of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 50.

² *Ibid.*, 52.

³ *Ibid.*

Horkheimer and considers it the cause of the weakening of the original Frankfurt School program. Habermas' reading of Nietzsche, despite its shortcomings, is readily accepted by most of his supporters. But as we have also seen in Chapter Six, the corrective to the Habermasian reading occurs within the confines of the Frankfurt School itself, via Honneth's revisionist reading of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. We could further complement and strengthen Honneth's revisionist reading if we highlight here what he actually thinks of the importance of Nietzschean genealogy for critical theory:

To each attempt to carry out an immanent critique of society under the premises of social rationalization must belong the genealogical project of studying the real context of application of moral norms. For without the addition of such a historical test, critique cannot be sure that the ideals it adduces still possess in social practice the normative meaning that originally distinguished them. To this extent, social criticism that has learned from the dialectic of enlightenment simultaneously delineates the norms at its disposal from two sides. On the one hand, the norms must satisfy the criterion of being socially incorporated ideals at the same time as they are the expression of social rationalization; on the other hand, it must be tested whether they still possess their original meaning. Today, it is no longer possible to have social criticism that does not also use genealogical research as a detector to ferret out the social shifts of meaning of its leading ideals.⁴

Honneth's insistence on the link between genealogy and immanent critique is in stark opposition to Habermas' uncharitable interpretation of

⁴ *Ibid.*, 52-53.

genealogy, whether in its Nietzschean or Foucaultian variant. Habermas considers genealogy to be a kind of transcendental historiography⁵ and his criticism of Foucault in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* resembles and, in fact, is an extension of his damning critique of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* on account of its Nietzschean elements.⁶ Honneth, on the other hand, sees the critical potential of genealogy and recasts it in such a way as to make it compatible with immanent critique and also, as I will later show, compatible with the notion of critical disclosure. Based on Honneth's interpretation, genealogy is a potent critical tool because, as critical historiography, it allows us to tell a story of the origins of social norms, whereby it becomes possible for us to assess the shifts in the meanings of our normative standards. What genealogy reveals is that, depending on the circumstances, the meanings of our normative or moral valuations evolve, sometimes devolve, through time. This is one of the main insights we learn from *On the Genealogy of Morals*, where Nietzsche chronicles the dialectical shifts of meaning in our moral valuations. For example, the meaning of "good" or "bad" does not depend on a metaphysical universal meaning, but, rather, depends on *who* or which group of people (either barbarians or resentful ascetics) is interpreting goodness or badness (see GM I, 10-11). In this context, norms are interpreted as social constructions with fleeting and

⁵ Cf. Thomas McCarthy, "Introduction," in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. by Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1990), xiv.

⁶ See Habermas, *ibid.*, 238-293.

adaptable meanings; as such, they are also subject to scrutiny. According to Honneth's reading, genealogy contributes to immanent critique in two ways:

- 1) genealogy reveals that our socially constructed norms constitute the material fabric of society as "social rationalization" (perhaps this is close to Hegel's notion of "spirit") and 2) since these socially constructed norms, more often than not, do not possess their original normative meaning, genealogical critique also reveals or at least provides for us a narrative from which we could make sense of the dialectical shifts in meaning that led to the present state of social practices. Ultimately, what this entails is that it becomes not only possible to recognize social pathologies in the present condition of society, but also to diagnose these social pathologies in terms of their past, that is to say, in terms of the disclosure of the sedimentary structure of our moral valuations which involve, among other things, the ideological baggage that is otherwise dissimulated in our present social practices. Honneth indeed provides a firm ground from which we could advance a revision of Nietzschean genealogy and its significance for a critical theory of society. If we follow Honneth's argument correctly, then it would be difficult not to consider genealogy as an indispensable component of critical theory. I would like to take the path that Honneth has cleared for us. To extrapolate from his argument, I will attempt to contextualize Nietzschean genealogy within the notion of critical disclosure.

Discussions today of genealogy, as a licit critical methodology, generally involve the name of Michel Foucault, whose works can be regarded as the very incarnation of the spirit of the genealogical method.⁷ Like the authors of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Foucault regards Nietzsche's method as a potent critical historiography that could lay bare the ideological presuppositions of the Enlightenment. Foucault's 1971 essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" is perhaps the most compelling account or justification for why genealogy is an effective social critique; it attempts to dispel common misconceptions of genealogical critique as well as a description of Foucault's own style of genealogy.⁸ He would later use the term genealogy to refer to his overall approach to his study of ethics.⁹ I would like to stress here, as do commentators like Honneth and Karin Bauer, the strong link between Foucault's approach and early critical theory (especially Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse).¹⁰ Nevertheless, while I

⁷ The debate on Foucault's relation to critical theory is usually recast in Habermas' critique. See, for instance, the very interesting and unique collaborative work-cum-debate by David Couzens Hoy and Thomas McCarthy, *Critical Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994) and the collection of critical essays edited by Samantha Ashenden and David Owen eds., *Foucault contra Habermas: Recasting the Dialogue between Genealogy and Critical Theory* (London: Sage Publications, Ltd., 1999).

⁸ See Michel Foucault, Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 139-164. Perhaps it is worthwhile to note that Foucault's essay represents the height of Foucault's radical appropriation of Nietzsche, where knowledge was reduced to the dynamics of power relations. Genealogy was viewed by Foucault as a tool in exposing this dynamics. Later on in Foucault's career, however, he would reinterpret power in a more positive light, as the very dynamics for the creation of the self.

⁹ See Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics," in *Continental Ethics Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 200-206.

¹⁰ Within the inner circle of the Frankfurt School tradition, Honneth offers the most sustained attempt at a *rapprochement* between Foucault's work and critical theory. See, for

acknowledge Foucault's genealogical critique to be thoroughly Nietzschean in spirit, my focus here is not to discuss the Nietzsche-Foucault relation in detail,¹¹ but, rather, to recast Nietzschean genealogy within the context of a convincing immanent critique of society, while I also refer to some aspects of Foucault's appropriation of Nietzschean genealogy.

It is important to map out *prima facie* convergences between Nietzschean genealogy and early Frankfurt School ideology critique, and for this task I will draw on and rehearse here, albeit in schematic form, Bauer's comparison between Nietzsche and Adorno, of which she outlines four similarities. Firstly, both Nietzsche and Adorno emphasize historical discontinuity, describing history in terms of "overcoming, subduing, and cunning, whose instrument is rationality."¹² In describing history in these terms, they show "how the perception of historical necessity was developed

example, the second part of his *The Critique of Power: Reflective Stages in a Critical Social Theory*, trans. by Kenneth Baynes (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1997), 99-202 and his essay "Foucault and Adorno: Two Forms of the Critique of Modernity," in *The Fragmented World of the Social: Essays in Social and Political Philosophy* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), 121-130. Also see Karin Bauer, *Adorno's Nietzschean Narratives: Critiques of Ideology, Readings of Wagner* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), 49-78.

¹¹ For detailed discussions of Foucault's methodology and his relation to Nietzsche, see David Owen, *Maturity and Modernity: Nietzsche, Weber, Foucault, and the Ambivalence of Reason* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Michael Mahon, *Foucault's Nietzschean Genealogy: Truth, Power, and the Subject* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992); Barry Smart, *Michel Foucault* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 47-53; Hans Sluga, "Foucault's Encounter with Heidegger and Nietzsche," in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 210-239; and Peter Dews, *Logics of Disintegration: Poststructuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory* (London: Verso, 2007), 215-234. Also see Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. by Seán Hand (New York: Continuum, 2006) and Mitchell Dean, *Critical and Effective Histories: Foucault's Methods and Historical Sociology* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 7-22. For an alternative view, especially on the differences between Nietzschean- and Foucault's genealogy, see Chapter 5 of Gary Gutting, *Foucault: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 43-53.

¹² Bauer, *Adorno's Nietzschean Narratives*, 77.

into a means of justifying the status quo and for enforcing conformity.”¹³ Secondly, for Nietzsche and Adorno, moral and epistemological valuations, and their ramifications in history, are understood in materialistic terms, they trace moral valuations “back to their undatable origin in the rational principle of exchange that had always already been the result of displacements and transformations.”¹⁴ Thirdly, the metanarrative accounts of Nietzsche and Adorno are emphatically post-metaphysical; they employ, instead, “an open and mobile strategy of interpretation that does not derive its legitimacy from a claim to power and truth,”¹⁵ rather, what this strategy questions is the dynamics of power and the notion of truth as they play out in human history. And fourthly, Bauer rightly emphasizes that, notwithstanding their critique of Enlightenment ideologies, Nietzsche and Adorno do not “divorce themselves from the history of civilization they are describing and the dominant ideologies they attempt to displace.”¹⁶ The schematization of their critique of Enlightenment is profoundly informed by the intricacies of the ideals of Enlightenment and their ramifications in history. Bauer also adds:

Since Nietzsche and Adorno maintain that values are the result of interpretations and misinterpretations, they can only propose alternative interpretations and displacements and must thematize the interpretative process in order to make visible their own fallibility. The

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

displacements of interpretation are achieved by rational as well as through form, method, and style.¹⁷

The timbre of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is patterned after the provocative style of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, a cultural critique that Adorno and Horkheimer employ in their own critical challenge to the monolithic structure of Western civilization, but more specifically in their attempt to disclose the pathological turn of human reason in the wake of Nazism and Stalinism. Like Nietzsche's narrative of the origins of our moral valuations and their deeply psychological and repressive implications, Adorno and Horkheimer tell us an overarching story of the origins of our mimetic encounter with nature and how this encounter evolved into an internalized and domineering or ideological outlook that results in its very own self-destruction. In other words, how the mimetic impulse, considered by Adorno and Horkheimer as the foundation of the development of reason, got repressed in the process; more specifically, how the aesthetic domain of the same mimetic impulse got marginalized, while reason evolved into the human propensity to dominate nature. Indeed, the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* echoes Nietzsche's most dialectical, that is to say Hegelian, statement, "*That the highest values devalue themselves*" (WP I, 2), in this case, the self-cancellation of the very ideals of Enlightenment reason. In this sense, Nietzschean genealogy and the ideology critique of the early Frankfurt

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 77-78.

School offer us an insight into the peculiar dialectical development of “Western rationality”—either in the guise of Christian morality and nihilism or Western fascism and capitalism—that could be made the basis of our historical self-understanding. The performative ambivalence of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* towards Nietzsche—that is, Nietzsche as challenge and culmination—is itself a crucial element of critique, more specifically, immanent critique. As David Owen puts it, both genealogy and ideology critique aim to emancipate us from some form of perceptual or ideological “captivity.”¹⁸ What this, moreover, entails is that the starting point of immanent critique is the recognition that there is “something wrong” with our current worldview and that we are held captive by this worldview. The recognition of the bankruptcy of our long-held worldview and our being captive by it—in other words, the bankruptcy of our normative standards—is presupposed by immanent critique inasmuch as it is a form of social criticism that bases its normativity on a “reconstruction of moral norms that are anchored in the social practices of a given society. ...”¹⁹ I take this “reconstruction of moral norms” to mean a re-enactment or re-description of actual social conditions which discloses, sometimes dramatically as in the case of *On the Genealogy of Morals* and the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the

¹⁸ See David Owen, “Criticism and Captivity: On Genealogy and Critical Theory,” in *European Journal of Philosophy*, 10:2 (2002), 216.

¹⁹ See Axel Honneth, “Reconstructive Social Critique with a Genealogical Proviso: On the Idea of ‘Critique’ in the Frankfurt School,” 47.

incongruence between social normative standards as they are purportedly practiced and their historical origins.

In the context of critical disclosure, what this re-enactment of social conditions entails is the re-description of social pathologies (Honneth) which requires our receptivity to the particularity and plurality of our experiences (Kompridis) within a given social matrix. In other words, our perceptual captivity is seen, and thereby challenged, by an immanent type of social criticism which scrutinizes social reality from within and not from without. As such, it is hoped that through an immanent critique our perceptual captivity is revealed as a consequence, even a feature, of our systemic entwinement with instrumental reason—a kind of reason that obviously creates for itself a universal system of delusion.²⁰ It is my contention that both Nietzschean genealogy and the ideology critique of the early Frankfurt School bear the features of a convincing disclosing critique of society, namely, 1) the opening up of new or alternative horizons of meaning that can show the extent to which social relations have pathological characteristics and through which 2) a reflective stance is elicited.

As I noted in the previous chapter, I understand pathology in terms of human suffering; but this notion of pathology could be further contextualized as the experience of individual or collective suffering that is

²⁰ Cf. Albrecht Wellmer, *The Persistence of Modernity: Essays on Aesthetics, Ethics, and Postmodernism*, trans. by David Midgley (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1993), 4.

largely caused by our systematic entwinement with the repressive tendencies of a prevailing worldview. These repressive tendencies could also be further contextualized as, for example, feelings of guilt, fear, and punishment as psychosocial upshots of nihilism (see *GM* III, 20, also see *Z* II, 20) or the atrophying or neurotic effect of the administered repression and control of internal nature expressed, most effectively, in the deceptive apparatuses of modern fascism and culture industry (see *DE* 94-136, also see *ND* 298). A further distinction should be made with regard to the Nietzschean understanding of suffering, for there are at least two senses of suffering found in Nietzsche's works. With reference to *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Raymond Geuss distinguishes between "meaningful suffering" (e.g., an athlete training for an event) and "senseless suffering" (e.g., torture, poverty, etc). Geuss further remarks that we "humans do not in general find the former kind of suffering problematic, but the latter is intolerable . . ."²¹ In a more Nietzschean parlance, this is the distinction between the "life-affirming" and "life-negating" modes: the former is attuned to self-realization and the latter is the blockage or the distortion of self-realization (if we use Honneth's own words). While the talk of "self-realization" might sound individualistic, there is no reason why such concept cannot be extended to society as a whole, as Honneth does in his dialectical description

²¹ Raymond Geuss, *Outside Ethics* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005), 111.

of the relation between social ethics/normality and social pathology (see Chapter Six of this study). In contextualizing suffering in these terms, what I wish to outline is the immanence of perceptual captivity or, put another way, I wish to highlight that the recognition—by which I mean subjecting to critical reflection—of suffering is only possible as a psychosocial phenomenon, a historically and socially located reflective activity: the starting point is always the here and now—*in medias res*—or what Hegel refers to, quite ambiguously, as the realm of “spirit.”²²

This is also one way of making sense of the idea of immanent critique. I would consider genealogy and ideology critique as forms of immanent critique for two reasons: first, because the suspicion that arises out of the recognition of social pathologies is itself conditioned, dialectically speaking, by the systemic oppression within a societal matrix and, second, because the theoretical or conceptual resources used for criticism are not wrought from some external or ethereal realm, but are themselves also conditioned by the intricacies of the object of criticism. What seems to be involved in this type of social critique is the possibility of “pointing out what it is that we, as spiritual beings, are doing already and then making sure we do not misunderstand what it is we are and are doing.”²³ As immanent critique,

²² See G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, trans. by A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 263-409.

²³ Geuss, *Outside Ethics*, 116-117.

genealogy and ideology critique are thoroughly historical and emphatically post-metaphysical.

B. Genealogy as Immanent Critique

The fact that Habermas' critique of the early Frankfurt School is linked to his misgivings about Nietzsche is a crucial point. Surveying the various aspects of the Habermasian worry is helpful in the sense that it does not only show us Habermas' disagreement with early critical theory, but it reveals Nietzsche's important role in what Habermas refers to as the "turning point" in the history of Western philosophy: "the entry into postmodernity."²⁴ In Chapter Five, I have noted that Habermas' somewhat blanket criticism of philosophers such as Heidegger, Foucault, Bataille, Adorno, Horkheimer, and Derrida—or what he refers to, quite pejoratively, as the "postmodernists"—hinges on his position on Nietzsche's philosophy. It might, however, come as a surprise that Habermas began with a more sympathetic appraisal of Nietzsche's philosophy, in particular, a reading of the latter's second *Untimely Meditations* and "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense," where Habermas, albeit still very critical of Nietzsche's radical perspectivism, acknowledges the critical potential of a more developed epistemology that takes into serious consideration the perspectival element of knowledge formation. The period between 1968 and the early seventies marks Habermas' more interesting and level-headed

²⁴ See Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 83-105.

reading of Nietzsche, for he sensed the importance of the post-metaphysical and post-epistemological temperament in Nietzsche's works,²⁵ as opposed to his later criticisms which merely reduced Nietzsche's philosophical contribution to a set of politically dangerous set of writings.

The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity represents Habermas' most intense, and reductive, critique of Nietzsche. Habermas claims that Nietzsche "renounces a renewed revision of the concept of reason and bids farewell to the dialectic of enlightenment."²⁶ In opposition to Nietzsche and Adorno, Habermas has a very optimistic view of the dialectic of Enlightenment that is animated by his positive notion of reason as a "reconciling self-knowledge," a "liberating appropriation," and a "compensatory remembrance."²⁷ While Habermas, akin to Hegel, interprets the dialectic of Enlightenment as humankind's glorious emancipation from the obscurantism of religion and metaphysical thinking as part of the expansion of reason, in other words reason's freedom from myth, he views Nietzsche as abandoning this very promise of Enlightenment reason; instead, Nietzsche is seen as continuing "the Romantic purification of the aesthetic

²⁵ See Jürgen Habermas, "On Nietzsche's Theory of Knowledge: Postscript from *Nietzsches Erkenntnistheoretische Schriften*," in *Habermas, Nietzsche, and Critical Theory* (New York: Humanity Books, 2004), 47-67 and *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. by Jeremy J. Shapiro (London: Heinemann, 1972), 274-300. For critical examinations of Habermas' "Postscript," see Max Pensky, "Truth and Interest: On Habermas's Postscript to Nietzsche's Theory of Knowledge," in *Habermas, Nietzsche, and Critical Theory*, 69-79 and Tracy B. Strong, "A Postscript on Habermas, Nietzsche, and Politics," in *Nietzsche, Theories of Knowledge, and Critical Theory: Nietzsche and the Sciences I* (London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), 307-313.

²⁶ Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 86.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 85.

phenomenon from all theoretical and practical associations"²⁸ and, in effect, by valorizing aesthetic experience over progressive reason, he dispenses the "emancipatory content"²⁹ of the Enlightenment project. What this amounts to, for Habermas, is a relapse back to the mythical thrall of religion, that is, of myth: "Nietzsche uses the ladder of reason in order to cast it away at the end and to gain a foothold in myth as the other of reason."³⁰ This relapse to myth, for Habermas, is none other than Nietzschean aestheticism; that is why he finds in *The Birth of Tragedy* a "peculiar theodicy according to which the world can be justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon."³¹ Habermas argues that by advancing a form of aesthetics or metaphysics of illusion,³² Nietzsche explodes "modernity's husk of reason"³³ and relinquishes the reconciling, liberating, and reconciliatory promise of the Enlightenment.

Habermas launches his attack on Nietzsche and Adorno by obverting the central tenet of genealogy and ideology critique—the dissimulated self-destruction of Enlightenment reason. Inasmuch as Habermas interprets Nietzsche- and Adorno's emphasis on aesthetic or mimetic experience as a

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 94.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 86.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 94.

³² Habermas summarizes Nietzsche's aesthetics in the following: "The world appears as a network of distortions and interpretations for which no intention and no text provides a basis. Together with a sensibility that allows itself to be affected in as many different ways as possible, the power to create meaning constitutes the authentic core of the *will to power*. This is at the same time a *will to illusion*, a will to simplification, to masks, to the superficial; art counts as man's genuine metaphysical activity, because life itself is based on illusion, deception, optics, the necessity of the perspectival and of error." *Ibid.*, 95.

³³ *Ibid.*, 86.

scathing and blanket attack on reason, the aesthetic/mimetic paradigm is reduced to mythology or a politically precarious metaphysics. There are at least three important features of the Nietzsche-Adorno position that Habermas seems to brush off, thereby eschewing the critical potential of genealogy and ideology critique. Firstly, Habermas ignores or downplays the critical force of the disclosure of the "irrational" basis of the Enlightenment project, i.e., that the progress that reason promises is always bound to regression due to reason's undermining of its very own values (devaluation of the highest values) or normative content and that the Enlightenment project is in itself a paradigmatic type of mythology that merely replaces religion and metaphysics. Modernity, in this context, can be construed as the secularization of religion—the triumph of the promise of Enlightenment reason over the salvific promise of Christian morality. Modernity is interpreted by Nietzsche as the moment when humankind takes over and assumes the responsibilities of a dead God. This is no more than the substitution of "reason" and "science" for God in order to account for the foundation of reality. Nonetheless, this is just the superimposition of yet another fiction or myth over the old one. "God is dead," Nietzsche writes, "but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown.—And we—we still have to vanquish his shadow, too" (GS 108). Enlightenment reason, for Nietzsche, is akin to religion and metaphysics inasmuch as it is practically an

“interpretation” of life, whereas “interpretation,” in this very specific Nietzschean sense, is a gesture of valuation, or the act of according value to life or to anything that we deem important (e.g., the ideals of modernity); it is, therefore, a form of will to power (see *WP* III, 556 and 675).³⁴

Secondly, emancipation from the thrall of religion or metaphysics does not guarantee that we are shielded from ideology and, as a matter of fact, this is precisely the most dangerous aspect of Enlightenment reason (or any interpretation of life for that matter), for it is in the ideological moment when reason reverts back to myth. In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the term “ideology” is understood in the context of the political application of myth, that is, myth in its most procrustean and totalitarian manifestation in history (see *DE* 32-33).³⁵ In addition to this, both Nietzsche and Adorno do not accept the naïve view that the dialectic of Enlightenment simply follows a straightforward and unswerving historical trajectory. Rather, “the emancipation from religious and metaphysical views of the world is not synonymous with a progressive expansion of reason, nor does it liberate the individual.”³⁶ In opposition to a teleological historiographical model, Nietzsche and Adorno view history as a perpetual duel between two

³⁴ Specifically, Nietzsche writes: “One may ask: ‘who then interprets?’ for the interpretation itself is a form of the will to power . . .”; “All ‘purposes,’ ‘aims,’ ‘meaning’ are only modes of expression and metamorphoses of one will that is inherent in all events: the will to power”; and “valuation itself is only this will to power.”

³⁵ For a similar discussion of this point, see Andrew Von Hendy, *The Modern Construction of Myth* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 297.

³⁶ Bauer, *Adorno’s Nietzschean Narratives*, 32.

compulsions: the antinomic struggle between our need to create life-enhancing myths and our somewhat dissimulated urge to destroy them. This view of history is at the very core of Nietzsche- and Adorno's conception of the dialectic of Enlightenment, although the latter thinker is more explicit about the ethical imperative and redemptive aspect of the disclosure of these two opposing tendencies—the remembrance of Western rationality's suppression of mimetic impulse and the reinscription of the same mimetic impulse to revive our lost relation with the non-identical. With this in mind, Habermas' accusation that Nietzsche skirts around the implications of modernity³⁷ is a hasty observation. On the contrary, Nietzsche exposes the Janus face of modernity and, even before Max Weber, dramatically illustrates the "iron cage" of modern life in terms of the disastrous potential of scientific rationalization or what he would also refer to as "nihilism," a point which Adorno himself takes up from Weber.³⁸

Thirdly, Habermas' reliance on an overly optimistic view of reason forces him to maintain the dichotomy between reason and myth. Meanwhile, Nietzsche and Adorno emphatically remind us that reason and myth are inextricably entwined and that the paradoxical nature of reason is

³⁷ See Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 94.

³⁸ On precisely this point, J. M. Bernstein writes: "Adorno's own understanding of this situation is more heavily indebted to Max Weber's sociological elaboration of Nietzsche than it is to Nietzsche himself. For Weber the nihilism complex is denominated 'rationalization,' whose two interlocking elements – the disenchantment of the world as a consequence of the development of modern science ('intellectualisation') and the bureaucratization of everyday life leading to the 'iron cage' – are evident successor versions of Nietzsche's two part rational/practical analysis." *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 7.

that it always has an irrational content. Habermas insists on a strict dichotomy between reason and myth, where he sees reason—embodied in modern morality, law, and science—triumphantly supplanting the ominous character of myth. In Habermas' model, myth is the other of reason—myth is the irrational. Habermas thinks that Nietzsche and Adorno overemphasize art and aesthetic experience, thereby rendering them blind to the possibility of justification via communicative rationality:

The comparison with Nietzsche is instructive inasmuch as it draws our attention to the aesthetic horizon of experience . . . Nietzsche detaches that moment of reason, which comes into its own in the logic proper to the aesthetic-expressive sphere of value, and especially in avant-garde art and art criticism, from its connection with theoretical and practical reason; and how he stylizes aesthetic judgment, on the model of a "value appraisal" exiled to irrationality, into a capacity for discrimination beyond good and evil, truth and falsehood. In this way, Nietzsche gains criteria for a critique of culture that unmasks science and morality as being in similar ways ideological expressions of a perverted will to power, just as *Dialectic of Enlightenment* denounces these structures as embodiments of instrumental reason. This confirms our suspicion that Horkheimer and Adorno perceive cultural modernity from a similar experiential horizon, with the same heightened sensibility, and even with the same cramped optics that render one insensible to the traces and the existing forms of communicative rationality.³⁹

Habermas is, of course, aware that at the background of communication, especially rational communication, are value judgments. However, by prioritizing and totalizing communicative rationality, he

³⁹ Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 128-129.

universalizes the language of reason without minding, for instance, the ambiguous particularities of different "native" languages (English, German, French, Tagalog, etc.) which are themselves products of value judgments. Habermas, Bauer comments, "does not recognize the positing of value judgments as an activity of instrumental reason, whose underlying motivations do not rest necessarily in an objectively subjective rationality that seeks the better argument."⁴⁰ The critical impulse of genealogy and ideology critique is precisely this suspicion over a universalized pragmatics of language. Nietzsche and Adorno are wary of the *not too obvious* fact that what appear to be "better insights" can sometimes be the vehicle for systemic repression, in contradistinction to the somewhat sanguine view that the Enlightenment is an irreversible process of learning, an antidote to repression, whereby old insights are "corrected by better insights," that is to say, "radicalized enlightenment."⁴¹ The question remains as to how radical this notion of radicalized enlightenment is. Habermas is correct to point out that Adorno theorized in a similar experiential horizon to that of Nietzsche; indeed Nietzsche and Adorno unmask the nihilistic or ideological tendency of the modern episteme as either a perverted will to power or a manifestation of instrumental reason; however, this genealogical or critical observation is precisely what Habermas claims to be the uncritical element in

⁴⁰ Bauer, *Adorno's Nietzschean Narratives*, 34.

⁴¹ Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 84.

both genealogy and ideology critique and deems Nietzsche and Adorno guilty of oversimplifying modernity. But one wonders if this is so.

If one looks into the critical implications of the disclosure or re-description of the hidden nihilistic or ideological foundations of our rather banal practices (communication for instance) diagnosed by genealogy and ideology critique, then one realizes that these critical implications are hardly an oversimplification of modernity. Robert Pippin, for instance, observes that Nietzsche's problem is precisely the problem of the possibility of "resolution" in modern culture, resolution in terms of linguistic practices which are normatively grounded in procedural exchange that tend to attenuate the ambiguities of language. Pippin argues that Nietzsche's "refusal of immediacy" is informed by the latter's sensitivity to the "aporia" of modern culture, the very temperament of ambiguity already performed in the works of Rousseau (culture and nature), Kant (antinomies of reason), and Hegel (nature and philosophy of nature).⁴² With this, one may extend the argument little further by claiming, against Habermas, that Nietzsche and Adorno offer a more "radical" reading of the architectonic of modernity; so radical that its strength is precisely in its attempt at an immanent critique, that is to say self-understanding, of modernity. It is because the critique proceeds from an immanent standpoint that Nietzsche and Adorno are able

⁴² See Robert Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem: On the Dissatisfactions of European High Culture* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 104.

to recognize the overwhelming tendency of reason to overstep the promise of its very own ideals, that is, its implicit complicity with systemic domination. In the context of genealogy and ideology critique, "rationality functions not as the universalized ground for subjective agency, but rather as a tool for the subject's objectivizing will to self-preservation and self-affirmation."⁴³ This is dramatically illustrated in Nietzsche's genealogical narrative of the ascetic priest's bid for dominion over the creatures of the earth (see *GM* III, 11-14) and Adorno's retelling of the story of Odysseus' cunning overcoming of the Siren's song (see *DE* 35-62). This telling recognition of the ominous side of Enlightenment reason prompts Nietzsche and Adorno to reconsider a path towards the self-understanding of reason that does not simply hail reason for its progressive promises, but, would, in addition, accentuate—as it were a self-corrective principle—the irrational or mythical foundation of reason. But, for Habermas, this is an unacceptable move; but how else could Habermas declare the self-destructive tendency of reason? In contradistinction to Habermas, Adorno, his lecture "The Meaning of Working Through the Past," discusses the danger of turning a blind eye to the irrational basis of modern rationalism, as paradoxical as it may be (see *CM* 89-103); and in an ensuing interview, he acknowledges Nietzsche and Freud for championing a type of cultural critique that exposes the dangerous psychological repercussions of repressing "instinctual impulses" and

⁴³ Bauer, *Adorno's Nietzschean Narratives*, 34.

“affects” that result “in distorted, twisted, altered form as aggression, as projection, as displacement, all those things we are so familiar with, and wreak havoc” (CM 299). In *On the Genealogy of Morals* and elsewhere, Nietzsche refers to the repression of instinctual impulses as the ascetic ideal which is projected more concretely in the spirit of *ressentiment*, bad conscience, or herd instinct (GM I, 10 and GS 166; also Z II, 1).⁴⁴ It is this psychological import of genealogy and ideology critique that Habermas seems to attenuate.⁴⁵

Unlike Honneth, Habermas is too quick to dismiss the important role that Nietzschean genealogy can contribute to critical theory. In addition to what is discussed above as Habermas’ basic contention against the style of Nietzsche and Adorno, it is important to take issue with the fact that Habermas’ understanding of Nietzschean genealogy is based on a misreading of the basic thrust of *On the Genealogy of Morals*:

. . . Nietzsche goes back to the very dimension of the myth of origins that permits a distinction which affects *all other* dimensions: What is *older* is *earlier* in the generational chain and nearer to the origin. The more *primordial* is considered the more worthy of honor, the preferable, the more unspoiled, the purer: It is deemed better. *Derivation*

⁴⁴ Gilles Deleuze calls this the “spirit of revenge”: “the instinct of revenge is the force which constitutes the essence of what we call psychology, history, metaphysics, and morality” and “Hatred or revenge is hidden even in the most tender and most loving memories.” *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 35 and 117.

⁴⁵ On this point, see Elliot L. Jurist, *Beyond Hegel and Nietzsche: Philosophy, Culture, and Agency* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2002), 104-121.

and *descent* serve as criteria of rank, in both the social and the logical sense.⁴⁶

On precisely this point, Geuss points out that Habermas misses an important distinction between two opposing connotations of "genealogy." According to Geuss, it is crucial to understand the peculiar context within which Nietzsche uses the term genealogy: "Giving a 'genealogy' is for Nietzsche the exact reverse of what we might call 'tracing a pedigree'."⁴⁷ The practice of tracing pedigrees, Geuss notes, is as old as the *Iliad*, considered as the oldest text of Western literature. The imagery of a sceptre being passed down from Zeus to Agamemnon narrates how the latter has inherited from his ancestors something invaluable that cuts one from the rest of humanity. "The general context is one of legitimizing or at any rate of positively valorizing some (usually contemporary) person, institution, or thing."⁴⁸ Ultimately, what a pedigree entails is the tracing of "a series of unbroken steps of transmission to a singular origin"⁴⁹ which signifies purity or positive value. As a direct contrast to search for pedigree, Nietzschean genealogy differs substantively because it is not undertaken to legitimize or valorize any given person, institution, practice, or thing in the present. Moreover, Nietzsche does not subscribe to the practice of historiography that accounts for "a series of unbroken steps of transmission," but, rather, genealogy

⁴⁶ Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 125-126.

⁴⁷ Raymond Geuss, *Morality, Culture, and History: Essays on German Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

highlights the discontinuities and subtle breaks in history. Furthermore, inasmuch as Nietzschean genealogy reveals the dialectical, as opposed to continuous, thread of historical development, it also reveals that there is no singular cause or origin to an event or institution in the present. *On the Genealogy of Morals* is precisely Nietzsche's attempt to demonstrate that what we, at present, refer to as Christianity did not simply originate from a singular and historically unadulterated cause, the official story being that the Bible is the word (*logos*) of God in all its purity and Jesus is the word made flesh (here too we see the link to metaphysics). Contrary to the official story, Nietzsche shows us the material or historical "origins" of Christian morality, that is to say, a conjunction of political, social, and psychological lines of development. To subject Christianity to genealogy amounts to "a historical analysis of the processes through which Christianity resulted from the interplay of forces in time."⁵⁰ Already here, genealogy aims to supplant the dominant interpretation of a historical phenomenon, thereby disclosing other possibilities of understanding the historical present.

With Geuss' distinction between the practice of tracing a pedigree and genealogy, we get a sense of Nietzsche's metaphorical use of the term. Although it is specifically applied in *On the Genealogy of Morals* as a search for "the *origin* of our moral prejudices" in the form of "a *critique* of moral

⁵⁰ Geuss, *Outside Ethics*, 158.

values, *the value of these values themselves must first be called into question*" (GM preface, 2 and 6); what this amounts to for Nietzsche is

. . . a knowledge of the conditions and circumstances in which they grew, under which they evolved and changed (morality as consequence, as symptom, as mask, as tartufferie, as illness, as misunderstanding; but also morality as cause, remedy, as stimulant, as restraint, as poison), a knowledge of a kind that has never yet existed or even been desired. One has taken the *value* of these "values" as given, as factual, as beyond all question . . . (GM preface, 6).

While Habermas is correct to mention the anti-egalitarian tendency of Nietzsche,⁵¹ he is wrong to associate this with Nietzsche's use of the genealogical method, since, as we have seen, the latter does not apply the method in the traditional sense of tracing a pedigree or family tree. Nietzsche is not conducting a nostalgic search for a greater or more aboriginal nobility, but, instead, aims to challenge the validity of what is otherwise regarded as "noble" or "highly valuable" in the present; in other words, he wants to put into question our dominant value system, that is, our presently legitimized notions of good-evil, proper-improper, or valuable-worthless. The genealogical question is not "*what* is the value of something?," let alone whether a thing is valuable in and by itself, but, rather, "*why* do we assign value to things?" The question, therefore, presupposes a critical stance towards the meaning of values, as opposed to a

⁵¹ Cf. Geuss, *Morality, Culture, and History: Essays on German Philosophy*, 6. Also see passages from GS 377; BGE 30, 40, 44, 202, 242; A 57.

categorical and passive acceptance of the “goodness” or “badness” of a thing. From a second-order perspective, in addition to questioning the origin and purpose of our valuations, genealogy is also concerned with the value of origin. In this context, genealogy operates in a chiasmus; the following formulation by Gilles Deleuze summarizes this point:

Genealogy means both the value of origin and the origin of values. Genealogy is opposed to absolute values as it is to relative or utilitarian ones. Genealogy signifies the differential element of values from which their value itself derives. Genealogy thus means origin or birth, but also difference or distance in the origin. Genealogy means nobility and baseness, nobility and vulgarity, nobility and decadence in the origin (italics mine).⁵²

Indeed, that genealogy is about “origin” is apparent, but what is not apparent is the sense of “origin” employed by Nietzsche. One way to understand Nietzsche’s specific sense of “origin” is to unpack Deleuze’s chiasmus—it is also here where we locate the critical stance of genealogy and from which we could claim that genealogy is a form of immanent critique. If genealogy means “the value of origin,” what this entails is that it is possible to critically assess the very notion of origin. Foucault, for his part, argues that the key to understanding the object of genealogy is by looking into the difference between the German words “*Ursprung*” and “*Herkunft*,” which are both typically translated into English as “origin,” diminishing their subtle nuance. Foucault writes that the search for the *Ursprung* “is an attempt to

⁵² Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 2.

capture the exact essence of things, their purest possibilities, and their carefully protected identities, because the search assumes the existence of immobile forms that precede the external world of accident and succession."⁵³ In this context, genealogy is a critique of *Ursprung*, as it is opposed to absolute or metaphysical values that are purported not to be bound to historical situatedness. If one "listens to history," Foucault remarks, one discovers that "there is 'something altogether different' behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms."⁵⁴ The genealogical turn to history is a movement from an ontology of transcendence to an ontology of becoming or difference; for while genealogy is the study of the "birth" of something, it also outlines the irrevocable distance from the origin, that is to say, the difference between the present form of something and its supposed origin. Hence, having listened to history, what is disclosed to the genealogist is not the inviolable identity of the origin of things, but, rather, "dissension of other things . . . disparity."⁵⁵ Meanwhile, *Herkunft*, Foucault intimates, is closer to the spirit of genealogy:⁵⁶ this stance is able to advance a thoroughgoing sensitivity to critical history that remains attentive to "origin" while, at the same time, rejecting a

⁵³ Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 142.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* For a more detailed discussion of this, see Mahon, *Foucault's Nietzschean Genealogy: Truth, Power, and the Subject*, 107-111.

⁵⁶ Cf. Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 145.

metaphysical- and teleological view of history, as well as the excesses of over-historicism which, paradoxically, is the beginning of a-historicism. This, in a sense, is what Nietzsche is saying about the antiquarian worldview in “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life”:

This always produces one very immanent danger: everything old and past that enters one’s field of vision at all is in the end blandly taken to be equally worthy of reverence, while everything that does not approach this antiquity with reverence, that is to say everything new and evolving, is rejected and persecuted. . . . When the senses of a people harden in this fashion, when the study of history serves the life of the past in such a way that it undermines continuing and especially higher life, when the historical sense no longer conserves life but mummifies it, then the tree gradually dies unnaturally from the top downwards to the roots—and in the end the roots themselves usually perish too. Antiquarian history itself degenerates from the moment it is no longer animated and inspired by the fresh life of the present (*UM* II, 3).

Once more, what is reiterated above is the metaphysical bias that also infects the “history of the historian”: “By searching out origins, one becomes a crab. The historian looks backward; eventually he also *believes* backward” (*TI* 24). Genealogy then does away with the search for the pure identity of origin (*Ursprung*); instead it cultivates the disparate and accidental nuances of events, highlighting the dialectical and sometimes violent interactions among these events as the constitutive origins of things. So, in this context, *Herkunft*, despite the fact that it is still related to “descent” or “stock,” is only a tracing of an “imaginary thread” inasmuch as what is revealed in the

thread is a series of dispersions or historical ruptures. Again, to quote Foucault:

A genealogy of values, morality, asceticism, and knowledge will never confuse itself with a quest for their "origins," will never neglect as inaccessible the vicissitudes of history. On the contrary, it will cultivate the details and accidents that accompany every beginning; it will be scrupulously attentive to their petty malice; it will await their emergence, once unmasked, as the face of the other. . . . The genealogist needs history to dispel the chimeras of the origin He must be able to recognize the events of history, its jolts, its surprises, its unsteady victories and unpalatable defeats—the basis of all beginnings, atavisms, and heredities.⁵⁷

Foucault's definition of genealogy confirms the second half of Deleuze's chiasmus—genealogy is *the origin of values*. By distinguishing between *Ursprung* and *Herkunft*, we get a sense of the post-metaphysical meaning of "origin" at play in Nietzschean genealogy; it is also by means of this post-metaphysical account of origin that Nietzsche is justified to talk about the immanent and contingent—that is, historical and psychosocial—foundation of our moral valuations, as opposed to transcendent and immovable origins advanced by metaphysical or antiquarian accounts of history. It is perhaps not too farfetched to interpret this feature of genealogy as *materialist*, for Nietzsche does speak of the disclosure of "conditions" and "circumstances" from which the present meaning of our values grew. If we follow Nietzsche's genealogical project along these lines, we right away see

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 144-145.

the mistaken interpretation of Habermas—for genealogy is not concerned with the primordial, much less does it valorize the primordial as pure and worthy of honor. While Habermas is correct to point out that Nietzsche goes back to the “myth of origins,” it is clear that Habermas is wrong to presume that Nietzsche is assigning value to historical events according to their closeness to their origins. In opposition to Habermas’ claim, the genealogical project does not aim to glorify origins, but, rather, sees origins in a more or less pragmatic and materialist sense; as such, Nietzsche indeed goes back to the myth of origins precisely to declare that the purity of origins is a myth. It is ironic that Habermas criticizes Nietzsche for advancing an unacceptable, by which he means rational, critique of Enlightenment reason—and clearly, this is due to the fact that what genealogy discloses is the “dark side” of Enlightenment. Because of his unwavering commitment to the Enlightenment project, more precisely to his belief that it is still possible for reason to be “pure,” his criticism backfires and he appears to the genealogist as a metaphysician par excellence.

In addition to Habermas’ profound misreading of the notion of origin in Nietzschean genealogy is his admonition against the genealogical disclosure of relations of power. Habermas questions Nietzsche’s critical authority for having laid down an “utterly unsociological concept of power” which has been very influential on thinkers like Heidegger, Foucault, and

Derrida.⁵⁸ Habermas is, of course, correct in pointing out the “unsociological” character of Nietzsche’s notion of power, by which he means the absence of any empirical research on the part of Nietzsche, something that Adorno and Horkheimer are also guilty of in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Habermas is worried that the genealogical project, with its emphasis on power struggles in social relations, threatens to clear away “the autonomy of self-regulating discourses as well as the epochal and linear succession of global forms of knowledge,” thereby erasing “all traces of communicative actions entangled in lifeworld contexts.”⁵⁹ However, Habermas’ rebuke seems to work to his advantage too easily, owing to his very restrictive idea of social critique. He is able to brand the critique of power as “unsociological”—that is, lacking normative and epistemic content via empirical research—because he restricts normativity to purely rational and discursively procedural discourses; while other forms of discourse, especially those which could be considered “world-disclosive” enterprises (e.g., genealogy, aesthetic or mimetic critique, hermeneutics, deconstruction), are simply regarded as degenerate or dangerous intellectual exercises. It would appear that for Habermas, it is only possible to critically appraise society when we acknowledge the existence of rational, universal standards that are binding to all parties, where the same universal standards are

⁵⁸ Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 249.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 268, 286.

deemed as placeholders for unadulterated communication. He is forwarding a method that acknowledges historical change, but one which avoids what he purports to be the relativism of world-disclosive discourses. As such, for Habermas, the contingencies of concrete social communicative exchanges are surpassed by their universal content, but only by overcoming their own social context. In the process, what is overstressed is the stark opposition between, on the one hand, discourses heterogeneous to reason and, on the other hand, communicative reason. Overstressing this opposition results in an unnecessarily limited conception of communication that shies away from the possibility of a third model that, while based on the disclosure of the systemic predominance and interruptive dynamism of power relations, still accepts the plausibility of intersubjective communication via mimetic and less discursive practices.⁶⁰ This third model, however, denies that it is possible to theoretically and definitively harness the powers of reason; what it stresses rather are reason's conceited appeal to autonomy and the overcoming of this conceit via reason's reorientation towards its mimetic origins. But by exposing reason's conceit, a new sensibility emerges which revamps the meaning of "reason *as* and *in* the

⁶⁰ Peter Dews holds a similar position, see his "Communicative Paradigms and the Question of Subjectivity: Habermas, Mead and Lacan," in *Habermas: A Critical Reader* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1999), 87-117. Dews' text, however, is an attempt to salvage Habermas' theory of communicative action from Habermas' limited conception of reason. In other words, Dews is trying to recast communicative action within the context of the third model mentioned above. The text reconciles the differences between Habermas, on the one hand, and Foucault and Derrida, on the other, via a comparison between Habermasian- and Lacanian philosophy of language.

other,"⁶¹ that is, a model of critique that develops the reconciliatory power of language that is receptive not only to intersubjective communication, but also to the subject's openness to the object.

Akin to the Kantian style of critique, which attempts to specify the transcendental or a priori conditions that make experience and understanding possible, Habermas specifies the a priori principle of communication with the tendency of disregarding the differential element of particular historical and cultural phenomena. In contradistinction to a transcendental critique of reason and communication, genealogical critique (of both Nietzschean and Foucaultian types) could be said to be an enterprise of disclosing "historical conditions of possibility" as critique's predisposition towards the future, towards social change. Nietzsche recognizes that any form of reflection is "anthropomorphic," which means that our reflective activity as humans is always already both historically- and culturally bound; in other words, thinking or human agency is always historically and culturally structured. Consequentially, the "objectivity" or "integrity" of any critical exercise is paradoxically grounded in the recognition of its very own "subjectivity" or "fallibility," that is to say, the recognition of critique's contextual and interested character.⁶² In this sense, genealogy contributes to social critique because it aims to expose the existence of subterranean human

⁶¹ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁶² Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is, of course, a discourse on the limitations of human reason and at least Habermas during the 1970s spoke of the relationship between knowledge and human interests. See also Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*.

or inhuman interests (e.g., will to power or social relations of power, emphasized by Nietzsche and Foucault, but also our ambiguous or ambivalent mimetic relation with outer nature, emphasized by Adorno and Horkheimer) that are embedded in our normative practices; at the same time, genealogy admits to be parasitic on these practices. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, as a form of critical disclosure, genealogy also identifies these subterranean interests to be the very conditions for possibility and, as such, the critique of these conditions also requires our reflective receptivity. Once again, we see here that the promise of critical disclosure supplied to us by the elective affinity between Honneth and Kompridis, the re-description of social conditions and our receptivity to these conditions, is consistent with the genealogical project.

It is here that Nietzschean genealogy and the ideology critique of early critical theory converge, and they converge precisely because, as forms of philosophical critiques, they share a common language that is wrought from a certain dissatisfaction with our current psycho-socio-historical self-understanding. For both genealogy and ideology critique, it is always a matter of the problematization of our present conditions; their concern is, therefore, to provide a history of the present in the form of an explanatory ontology that, albeit deeply metaphorical, connects the unreachable past to the present, if only to critically reflect on the present. Nietzsche's somewhat dithyrambic reflection on self-becoming, how one should become what one

is (see *GS* 270 and *EH*), could be interpreted as an inflection of Hegel's statement on the spirit's activity, potentiality, and becoming an object to itself.⁶³ It is an inflection upon which we could further interpolate that critique, disgruntled by the pathological turn of modern civilization, is a thoroughgoing self-reflexive activity—by becoming an object to itself, critique becomes its very own self-reflection and, as such, elevates its own receptivity to possibility to a higher or more dynamic level. Nietzsche's concern as to how we have become what we are is a reflection on the circumstances that enable and constrain our potentiality, one circumstance being our self-understanding of our socio-ontological state. Our socio-historical perspective is, thus, regarded by Nietzsche as the very fuel of our agency and vice-versa. There is a mutual interdependence between our perspective and our agency; the possibility of change is gleaned from *how* we recognize ourselves as agents, that is, how we construe ourselves as agents of change. It is only through this recognition that we are able to create a field of critical reflection and, hopefully, new ways of understanding and acting.⁶⁴ Perspective and agency are, therefore, contingent principles that emerge via their interdependent or dialectical dance in the situatedness of history. With this, it is not difficult to see this specific affinity between Nietzsche and Marx

⁶³ G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. by J. Sibree (New York: Dover Publications, 2004), 73.

⁶⁴ For a similar discussion, see David Owen, *Nietzsche, Politics & Modernity: A Critique of Liberal Reason* (London: Sage Publications, 1995), 39-41.

on this very specific point, that thinking or consciousness is largely conditioned by material or bodily forces.⁶⁵

Against Habermas' unfounded claim, genealogy is at its most sociological in its critical self-reflection of society's conditions (both allowance and restraint) for possibility or, more specifically, of our contemporary normative standards or perspectives that inform agency. Both Nietzsche and Adorno trace the articulations of these conditions in modernity, both respectively provide explanatory ontologies, such as the long history of nihilism in the West which modernity has inherited (Nietzsche), and the equally long history of the pathological and violent turn of our mimetic impulse—a history leading “from the slingshot to the megaton bomb” (*ND* 320)—finding its present articulation in the instrumental rationalization of modernity (Adorno). But in addition to, or perhaps more because of, the disclosive character of their explanatory models, Nietzsche and Adorno also uncover specific motifs of possibility and actuality. Genealogy renders history intelligible by providing a critical tool that is limber enough to penetrate the crevices that bring together both historical “continuity” and “discontinuity,” for history is a unity of both, as Adorno intimates (see *ND* 320). Genealogy and critical theory are both motivated by the breaking down of our contemporary self-understanding and they are both critical exercises that seek to explain why and how our

⁶⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 41.

self-understanding is the way it is in the present—how we have become what we are—and to disclose fields of possibilities, most often uncharted, that may instigate change or at least alternative ways of understanding ourselves.

Chapter Eight: Thinking the Other of Reason: Negativity as Ethics

The role of genealogy—be it as the critique of our moral valuations or the critique of ideology—is to disclose the hidden sub-text or sub-narrative behind the seemingly immediate events transpiring before our eyes. This is the critical power of *On the Genealogy of Morals* and the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: they are able to lift the lid of the common, exposing subtleties and complexities that are dissimulated by the reified life we are all living; these texts do so by re-describing the common, by exaggeration, by reconfiguring language itself—a form of heresy in the eyes of traditional philosophy. I have argued above that genealogy is best described or better yet best employed as critical disclosure inasmuch as it re-enacts socio-historical conditions by re-describing these conditions using a language that is receptive to the particularity, plurality, and differences in our experiences. Genealogy, moreover, is an immanent type of social critique because it scrutinizes social realities from within and, in the process of narration, reveals that our perception of these social realities is held captive by the status quo—be that of our systematic, yet deeply unconscious, entwinement with the culture of nihilism or instrumental reason. Ultimately, what genealogy reveals is our repressed mimetic sensibility; it shows us that we have forgotten our deeply somatic relation with the objects of nature, with the non-identical. The disclosure of our repressed state strikes a critical chord within us that brings us to realize repressed utopian energies, which,

in turn, opens up fields of possibilities for change and alternative ways of understanding ourselves.

For Adorno, the revival of our repressed mimetic impulse entails a deeper understanding of our complex relation with objects (both human and non-human). He hopes that through a more reconciliatory attitude towards objects, we are able to overcome the reified state of human affairs and recover human experience. In the following I will venture into a reconstruction of Adorno's revision of the subject-object dialectic, and, in a double gesture, I will also respond to the official Habermasian position against the subject-object dialectic. My contention is that, by unwittingly relegating Adorno's engagement with the subject-object relation to traditional epistemology, the Habermasian position totally misconstrues Adorno's attempt to revise the subject-object dialectic, thereby totally missing not only the disclosive power and critical potential of Adorno's account, but also the reconciliatory stance towards the non-identical. This reconciliatory stance towards the non-identical is described below as "cognitive utopia." Moreover, cognitive utopia is described in the second section as the recovery of experience in the sense that it reorients cognition to its somatic origins. The body is described as the locale of the mimetic moment. Cognitive utopia is the reconciliation of the mind and body, subject and object. I argue, following Adorno, that human cognition construed in the context of reconciliation is the ethical dimension of thinking.

A. Reconciliation: Revising the Subject-Object Dialectic

In Chapter Three, where I discussed Adorno's revaluation of the language of philosophy, it was pointed out that for Habermas the redemption of critical theory from the monistic cul-de-sac arrived at the exhaustion of the "philosophy of consciousness," a philosophical paradigm based on the ontological relation between subject and object, is only possible by turning to an intersubjective model based on communicative rationality. Habermas sees the subject-object model as suffering from an irrevocable monism in the sense that it begins with a transcendental ego (e.g., the Cartesian *Cogito*) that initiates the epistemic process or the act of knowing. From this supposed monological standpoint, the subject is not seen as constituted within a world of interaction, but, rather, gains theoretical and practical control of the object.⁶⁶ In other words, Habermas contends that the philosophy of consciousness does not account for the thoroughgoing sociality of interaction. The philosophy of consciousness is virtually taken to be the hallmark of Western philosophy—perhaps even from the time of the ancient Greeks, but having its Modern and most influential articulation in the works of Descartes, Kant, Spinoza, Leibniz, Schelling, and Hegel⁶⁷—but Habermas emphasizes its influence on Left-Hegelianism's notion of praxis which, in turn, has a profound impact on early critical theory. The

⁶⁶ Cf. Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, Volume One, trans. by Thomas McCarthy (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 387.

⁶⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*

philosophy of consciousness, Habermas notes, is grounded in a conception of the subject that subsumes the object both in “representation” and “action.” The mind, based on the subject-object model, functions to either “represent” or “produce” objects as they are. These two functions are inextricably related in the sense that intervention in nature and the production of objects presuppose knowledge of the state of affairs we call the world; such representational knowledge is motivated by the possibility of intervention.⁶⁸ In Marxism, the subject-object model takes the form of a paradigm of *production* that considers praxis as a form of productive activity (labor). This, for Habermas, is rooted in the standard version of Hegel’s account of the phenomenology of the subject which was given a materialist reading by Marx, and then a Hegelian reading of Marx by Lukács.⁶⁹ According to Habermas, the production model of praxis tends to equate production and labor (instrumental action), thereby remaining blind to the significance of communicative action. Via Habermas’ analysis of Lukácsian Marxism, this critique of the subject-object model trickles down to the early Frankfurt School, particularly to Adorno.

Adorno’s philosophical reflections on the subject-object relation are summarized in one of his last essays, called “Subject and Object,” published before his death in 1969. The essay could be read as a brief representation of

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ See *ibid.*, 361-365.

Adorno's metacritique of epistemology, echoing the basic arguments laid down in *Against Epistemology*, and a representation of his theory of meaning, strengthening the insights gathered in his "Theses on the Language of the Philosopher." The essay hints on, especially in the latter part, Adorno's philosophical anthropology, resembling Sartre's "man is a project" with his quasi-existentialist phrase: "Man is a result, not an *eidos*" (AR 150). The publication of "Subject and Object," on account of the timing of its first appearance, reveals that Adorno continued to seriously engage with this classical epistemological subject-object problematic throughout his career, leaving us the impression that he was well aware of the centrality, and indeed indispensability, of the subject-object relation in his own project. The essay also leaves us the impression that the subject-object relation is a performance of the irreducible aporia of provisionality, that is, of conditionality, qualification, and accident. The essay itself performs this aporia on account of the tentativeness and remarkable figuration of its presentation. Adorno attempts to discuss the subject-object relation by not couching the relation in absolute ontological terms, like in most traditional epistemologies, but in, rather, loosely organized, yet well-argued statements. The context of the statements is profoundly and necessarily epistemological; Adorno's aim is to highlight the inherent, yet dissimulated and often taken for granted, tensional conditions within the triangular structure of the object, subject, and definition. While Adorno sets out to make sense of, that is to

overcome, the aporias involved in the formation of knowledge—which, akin to Nietzsche, is deeply anthropological for Adorno—he argues that only by maintaining these aporias do we gain a sense of the “primacy of the object,” in opposition to constitutive subjectivity, and only through these aporias do we understand the inextricability between subject and object; they are inextricable because what we call “human consciousness” is a product of the symbiotic, albeit uneven, exchange between subject and object. Indeed, not only is a radical revision of the subject-object relation central for him, but it is arguably the backbone of his theory of language and his reinscription of the mimetic impulse.

However, with Habermas having set the ground for a total rejection of the subject-object model of cognition, any talk of the subject-object relation would appear banal and dated to commentators sympathetic to his position. For instance, Maeve Cooke illustrates in the following passages what can be regarded now as a conventional Habermasian position:

Habermas’s major contribution is to have recognized the need for a fundamental paradigm shift. In his view, most of the theoretical problems of classical Left-Hegelian theory are connected with a subject-object model of cognition and action. According to this model, knowledge and action are conceived instrumentally as the imposition of will by a solitary human subject on an object distinct from him. Habermas advocates a complete break with this model: he argues that the critique of instrumental rationality—developed most fully in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* but central to the entire tradition of Left-Hegelian theory—is not a fruitful direction for critical and social thinking since it relies on a model of cognition and

action that fails to allow for a nonrepressive relationship between the knowing and acting subject and the object of her thought and action. Instead he proposes a shift to an intersubjective framework.⁷⁰

Cooke further writes:

Thanks to his shift from a subject-object model of cognition and action to an intersubjective one, Habermas is also well placed to give an account of emancipation that is epistemologically nonauthoritarian. With regard to the motivation to think and act in emancipatory ways, he is able to avoid a position that roots motivation in invariant psychological structures that are immune to the influences of history and context.⁷¹

One cannot help but notice Cooke's rather incredible claims. Firstly, without distinguishing between the traditional model (offered by Plato down to Kant) and Adorno's revisionist model, she claims that the subject-object model of knowledge and action, conceives instrumental reason "as the imposition of will by a solitary human subject on an object distinct from him." Now this appears to be a literal, and hence over-simplistic, reading of Adorno- and Horkheimer's genealogical account of mimesis and its pathological turn to instrumental reason. A literal interpretation of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* fails to account for the complexity of the text, that is, its figurative or metaphorical presentation—more precisely, figuration as an instance of critical disclosure. Adorno- and Horkheimer's decision to use the *Odyssey* to retell the origin of subterfuge was not simply out of sheer

⁷⁰ Maeve Cooke, *Re-presenting the Good Society* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2006), 45.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

aesthetic taste, but because they were well aware that the text can effectively function as a tool for disclosure, thus opening up our eyes to levels of meaning that ordinary argumentative language would otherwise fail to deliver. Cooke's (and Habermas') literal interpretation is a gesture of unnecessarily warding off the critical potential of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, rendering its critical impulse inoperative.

Secondly, Cooke notes that the subject-object model "fails to allow for a nonrepressive relationship between the knowing and acting subject and the object of her thought and action." This is again a grave oversimplification and misreading of Adorno's position; more specifically, the Habermasian position purports to have corrected the epistemological monism of Adorno. It appears that the charge of monism, however, is a little too hasty, since the Habermasian position fails to acknowledge and justly comprehend the role that the notion of mimesis plays in the wider context of Adorno's project. Cooke's reading implies that a theory of mimesis, based on the subject-object dialectic, is devoid of any ethical content—in more Habermasian terms, mimesis is devoid of any normative content. On the contrary, Adorno's "Subject and Object" can be read, or should be read, as an ethical outcry against the ideological content and reificatory tendency of identity thinking embodied, in one instance, in constitutive subjectivity:

The more individuals are really degraded to functions of the social totality as it becomes more systematized, the more will man pure and simple, man as a principle with

the attributes of creativity and absolute domination, be consoled by exaltation of his mind (AR 141).

Moreover,

. . . the question of the transcendental subject's reality weighs heavier than appears in its sublimation as pure mind, fully so in the critical retraction of idealism. In a sense . . . the transcendental subject is more real – that is to say, more determinant for the real conduct of men and for the resulting society – than those psychological individuals from which the transcendental one was abstracted. They have little to say in the world, having on their part turned into appendages of the social apparatus and ultimately into ideology. The living human individual, as he is forced to act in the role for which he has been marked internally as well, is the *homo oeconomicus* incarnate, closer to the transcendental subject than to the living individual for which he immediately cannot but take himself (AR 141).

The ethical thrust of Adorno's essay is clear: the critique of the transcendental subject's usurpation of the object or, said differently, idealism's inwardization of the idea of the good life or the reduction of the subject-object relation to the hypostatization of the subject (AR 148-149) which also entails "mental imprisonment" (AR 145)—in other words, "constitutive subjectivity." This ethical impulse informs the entirety of the Adornoian enterprise; Adorno's stance towards reification could be viewed as an ethical battlecry from the standpoint of society's redemption. The utopian vision of Adorno is also clearly stated in "Subject and Object": a renewed sensitivity to the object, which is only possible via a revaluation of the subject's position in empirical cognition, as opposed to the subject's

formalism which is blindly endorsed by most traditional epistemology (AR 146). This utopian vision is also expressed optimistically, which is somewhat unusual for Adorno: “the relationship of subject and object would lie in the realization of *peace* among men as well as between men and their Other” (AR 140, my italics). This statement is in stark opposition to the Habermasian claim that the subject-object dialectic does not provide room for a nonrepressive relationship between subject and object; as a matter of fact, Adorno endorses intersubjectivity (“*peace* among men”), but he also goes beyond the intersubjective model by taking into earnest ethical consideration the nonhuman (“men and their Other”). In this context, it is not at all farfetched to assume “nature” as the nonhuman—the non-conceptual that is infinitely given, yet also infinitely escapes our conceptual grasp. Adorno’s proposal is to read the dialectical relation between subject and object from the standpoint of reconciliation:

If speculation on the state of reconciliation were permitted, neither the undistinguished unity of subject and object nor their antithetical hostility would be conceivable in it; rather, the communication of what was distinguished. Not until then would the concept of communication, as an objective concept, come into its own (AR 140).

As such, in Adorno’s view, reification can only be resisted by collapsing our conceptual mechanism neither into constitutive subjectivity nor simply into a pre-mimetic moment in history. Acknowledging the primacy of the object does not entail the hypostasis of the object, but, rather,

the recognition of the mediatory or dialectical interaction between subject and object, in the sense that the object is “infinitely given” (AR 146), that is to say, the inexhaustible *givenness* or the non-identical character of the object. It is in this sense that mimesis is reinscribed as enfeebled rationality, reason powerless over the object. Ironically, such powerlessness marks the non-domineering empowerment of the subject in the sense that the subject is reoriented into unrestrained experience: “the subject as unlimited experience will come closer to the object than the filtered residuum shaped to fit the requirements of subjective reason” (AR 146). What differentiates Adorno’s revised subject-object model from traditional epistemology and, indeed, from Left-Hegelianism, is its emphatic rejection of two tendencies in modern epistemology: 1) the tendency towards an irrationalism that advances a higher form of knowledge that exceeds the provisions of our rational capacity and 2) the tendency towards a kind of solipsism that reduces our field of experience to our purported capacity to grasp knowledge.⁷² This relapse into irrationalism and solipsism, for Adorno, could only be avoided via an immanent critique of our concepts, that is, by an immanent delimitation of the conditions that make experience possible. Adorno uses a revised subject-object model that pays attention to the structure of our conceptual language.

⁷² I am following here the formulation of Roger Foster, albeit slightly modified, in his *Adorno: The Recovery of Experience* (New York: University of New York Press, 2007), 28.

Cooke's last claim in favor of Habermas, and against the subject-object model, is that the latter's intersubjective turn allows him to defend a theory of emancipation while avoiding the error of positing "invariant psychological structures that are immune to the influences of history and context." If this claim is used to level against Adorno, then it is problematic in at least two ways. First, the critique of instrumental rationality, in general, and the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, in particular, does not purport to present invariant psychological structures, but queries the dialectical conditions for the emergence of our valuations or normative practices; if such method of inquiry reveals certain patterns in our behavior that transpire in history (e.g., language, mimesis, fear, domination, will to power, etc.), it does not follow that these patterns of behavior are invariant and are immune to the influences of history. On the contrary, such patterns of behavior are deeply rooted in history and they are only understood as socio-historical phenomena. Moreover, the Habermasian position, while dismissing psychological structures (invariant or otherwise), does not provide a convincing explanation for the reality of psychological patterns that inform how we behave in history and how these psychological patterns are, after all, the bases of many of our normative claims, e.g, freedom, human rights, justice, or the concept of a good life. While on the conceptual level, we could discuss these normative practices in transactional or procedural communication, our propensity or motivation to defend these normative

claims tooth and nail is pre-transactional or pre-procedural. Be that as it may, pre-transactional does not necessarily mean ahistorical; it does not follow that simply because it cannot be captured or positively identified by our conceptual apparatus or explained by reason that it is beyond the bounds of history or, in Adorno's case, natural history. But this non-identical feature of the pre-transactional is precisely what Habermas' intersubjective model purportedly circumscribes; Habermas is confident that reason manages to circumvent these pre-transactional psychological patterns, while it is itself deeply rooted in these patterns. Second, while it is fair enough to claim that Habermas avoids a nonauthoritarian position by advancing an intersubjective model, Cooke's statement implies that *only* the intersubjective model is able to defend such position. We have already seen that a revisionist subject-object model is also able to articulate and defend a nonauthoritarian stance and concomitantly also able to endorse a communicative stance. This being said, one can question the conventional view that an intersubjective theory of communication and a subject-object dialectical model are mutually exclusive. It appears that this view is unnecessarily overstated. It could be argued that Habermas' overconfidence in the rational structure of intersubjective communication runs the risk of rationalist foundationalism or what Adorno repeatedly calls idealism; as such, the Habermasian position also runs the risk of falling under the solipsistic error of modern epistemology outlined above.

I have, so far, tried to defend the Adornoian position with regard to the subject-object dialectic against Cooke's recounting of the Habermasian position. Based on the forgoing discussion, the conventional Habermasian reaction underestimates the Adornoian position and unnecessarily aborts the interpretive or disclosive potential of Adorno's revisionist stance. It is as an interpretive ontology that informs his theories of language and mimesis that Adorno's revision of the subject-object relation provides a scaffold for his notion of negative dialectics and aesthetic theory. As such, as an interpretive-disclosive ontology, the revised prognosis of the *chorismos* between subject and object reveals, or at least perceives, human language and thought's propensity towards ideology; this was already mentioned above, but there is more to be said about the dialectical relation between subject and object:

The separation is no sooner established directly, without mediation, than it becomes ideology, which is indeed its normal form. The mind will then usurp the place of something absolutely independent – which it is not; its claim of independence heralds the claim of dominance. Once radically parted from the object, the subject reduces it to its own measure; the subject swallows the object, forgetting how much it is an object itself (AR 139-140).

In other words, thinking's forgetfulness of its mimetic origin, its somatic interaction with nature's objects, results in the pathological turn of rationality. The argument that Adorno is being redundant by simply repeating epistemological investigations already made by past philosophers

(ranging from the earliest reflections of Plato and Aristotle, the Scholastic account of Aquinas, down to the Modern polemics of Descartes, Hume, Locke, and Kant) totally misses the point of his revision of the subject-object relation. What is missed in particular is that Adorno presents this epistemological theme, first and foremost, as *a* problem to be reckoned with and *not* simply a philosophical paradigm that one could conveniently appeal to. To be more specific, what is missed is Adorno's critique of the aforementioned ideological content of thinking and, more poignantly, the failure of the epistemological observations of past philosophers (from Plato to Kant) to properly address the problem of reification to which philosophy, more than any other discipline, unwittingly lends itself. Rather, past epistemological accounts consider the "primacy of human reason" as a given. For this reason, Adorno, as I have shown in Chapter Three, lobbies for a revaluation of the language of philosophy, for philosophy is itself suspended in the dynamics of thinking and, as such, is susceptible to conceptual reification. Indeed, Adorno follows past philosophers by problematizing the subject-object relation, which is probably the oldest epistemological quandary, and Habermas is probably correct to point out that Adorno's interpretation is still under the aegis of the "philosophy of consciousness." However, Habermas misses Adorno's intention of re-describing the subject-object relation in order to present a more robust story of their dialectical interplay from the standpoint of reconciliation. This is, of

course, linked to Habermas' refusal of Adorno's theory of mimesis and predisposition towards aesthetic critique. The unfortunate upshot of downplaying the incisiveness of rearticulating the subject-object dialectic, especially for critical theory, is that much is lost from a social critique that aims to question the dynamics of knowledge formation and how such formation becomes engrained in our normative practices.

B. Cognitive Utopia and the Recovery of Experience

The above discussion already points to the complexity of Adorno's revisionist model of the subject-object dialectic. He does not simply draw on terminology from traditional accounts of the philosophy of consciousness. "Subject and Object" is a re-articulation of the vexed question of the dialectic, but Adorno analyzes the dialectic from a critical standpoint. Adorno's style of questioning comports itself with the timbre of suspicion exhibited in the works of Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, and Derrida. Such an act of questioning, or more specifically the act of disclosing social pathologies that emerge from established normative practices, is precisely the aim of genealogical- and ideological critique intimated in the preceding chapters. Adorno's revision of the subject-object dialectic, I argue, is congruous with, if not an epitome of, critical disclosure: 1) it is, by itself, a revision or re-description (Honneth) of a profoundly socio-historical process that hopes to reveal or disclose the psychosocial conditions that are hidden behind our shared conceptual mechanism (or knowledge formation); moreover, 2) such disclosure will

forcibly test our receptivity (Kompridis) which will, hopefully, result in a more critical outlook on what is otherwise regarded as familiar. In this context, in opposition to Habermas' claim, Adorno is not simply repeating past attempts to solve the subject-object problem; solving it is far from his real concern. What Adorno does is to use the subject-object dialectic to reveal that all thinking is susceptible to "identity thinking." And by acknowledging this often neglected aspect of human consciousness, that is, by being receptive to the traumatic wreckage of a damaged or reified life, the possibility of reviving the utopian ideal of resisting reification and all its effects with "negative dialectics" as our new ethical imperative, our sensitivities come closer to an image of reconciliation—or, in Adorno's own words, we begin to realize the possibility of "the state of distinctness without domination, with the distinct participating in each other" (*AR* 140).

Adorno is well aware that the burden of reconciliation falls to the subject part of the dialectic, that is, to the part of our conceptual language. His proposal of a revaluation of the language of philosophy, which actually extends to a broader conception of language, seeks to orient philosophy to a utopian vision: "the state of distinctness without domination, with the distinct participating in each other." With his revision of the subject-object dialectic, Adorno is able to demonstrate the dynamics of reification that occurs amidst the dialectical exchange between our linguistically preformed conception of the world, on the one hand, and the non-identical world, on

the other. What I sought to bring forth in my discussion of Nietzsche- and Adorno's theory of language (Chapter Two and Chapter Three) is that both thinkers emphatically acknowledge the existence of a real physical world and, as such, they consciously avoid collapsing to sheer solipsism. On the other hand, they both strongly object to the naïve positivistic claim that we have direct access to the physical world as it is sans the mediation of a linguistic or conceptual apparatus. A third feature of the Nietzsche-Adorno position is the recognition of the thoroughly complex dynamics between the *world* (object) and our *worldview* (subject). Failure to acknowledge such complexity could either lead to a naïve positivism or a dangerous idealism. This complexity could be further expressed, as do Adorno and Horkheimer in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and Nietzsche in *Twilight of the Idols*, as human history's traversal of a course that eventually led to the hypostatization of our conceptual apparatus, where now our objects of experience are predetermined by our conceptual apparatus, what is referred to now as identity thinking (Adorno) or metaphysics (Nietzsche). The priority accorded to our conceptual mechanism over experience entails that concepts have become increasingly separated from their original cognitive basis in sensuous experience. Adorno describes this unfortunate trajectory as the *chorismos* or gnawing gap between subject and object which pathologically results in the distortion of both.

If the basic ethical thrust of Adorno's philosophy was described earlier as his critique of the reificatory character of constitutive of subjectivity, this ethical thrust hinges on a more fundamental advocacy of his enterprise: "the recovery of experience."⁷³ To be more precise: the recovery of experience from the virulent effects of identity thinking's conceptual imperialism. Impoverished experience or damaged life is described in "Subject and Object" as a form of "captivity": "Captivity was internalized; the individual is no less imprisoned in himself than in the universal, in society" (AR 145); the same impoverishment of experience is described in *Negative Dialectics* as a "spell" cast on human beings: "The spell is the subjective form of the world spirit, the internal reinforcement of its primacy . . . in its perversion, as impotent individualization . . . the particular is dictated by the principle of perverted universality" (ND 244). It is in this binding spell—the captivating illusion of freedom construed as primacy over the objects of nature, culminating in the inwardization of subjectivity—that the subject comes to assume a "perverted" image of its separation from

⁷³ I am borrowing here Foster's description of the overall thrust of Adorno's project as a "recovery of experience," which Foster considers to be Adorno's primary understanding of the critical role of philosophy: the breaking open of epistemology—a "notion of experience in involuntary memory, as opposed to the everyday work of habitual classification . . ." Moreover, "the recovery of experience must take the form of a type of process that uses the subject to 'break out' of the confinement that the role of the subject in cognition has come to resemble. Through the recovery of experience . . . Adorno in fact claims to be able to reveal the truth about the constituting subject, that is, its origin in the self-constriction of the subject, which leads to the social-historical condition of disenchantment. In this way, the subject is able to come to a reflection on its own conditionedness." *Ibid.*, 149, 151.

nature, separation in the sense of virulent abstraction, the totalization of reified consciousness. Such virulent abstraction, in Adorno's words,

. . . threatens the life of the species as much as it disavows the spell cast over the whole, the false identity of subject and object. The universal that compresses the particular until it splinters, like a torture instrument, is working against itself, for its substance is the life of the particular; without the particular, the universal declines to an abstract, separate, eradicable form (ND 346).

Indeed, here Adorno reiterates a basic assumption made in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: the hostility of humankind towards itself, "a denial of nature in the human being for the sake of mastery over extrahuman nature and over the other human beings" (DE 42). This is the unfortunate path that conceptual reason has taken, that is, mimesis gone awry. But Adorno does not propose to lead us back to a pre-mimetic state. What he proposes, rather, is the enfeebling of human reason's virulence, that is to say, reason's self-acknowledgement of its very own irrational content. Thus, akin to Kant who recounts human reason's limitations, Adorno maintains that reason's self-realization of itself as not entirely rational is immanent within itself:

The irrationality of the particularly realized *ratio* within the social totality is not extraneous to the *ratio*, not solely due to its application. Rather it is immanent to it. Measured by complete reason, the prevailing one unveils itself as being polarized and thus irrational even in itself, according to its principle (ND 317).

Not entirely rational—meaning, that reason’s irrationality lurks behind, and informs, its external presentation as knowledge, as science, as philosophy, and, indeed, as politics. The imperialism of reason lurks behind all these spheres of the social world. But the self-realization of reason, its polarization or recognition of “self-contradictoriness” as absolute identity, is also the key towards reconciliation; for self-realized reason will hopefully leave “the particular reason of the universal behind” or, in other words, when it begins to become receptive to the non-identical, it will begin to acknowledge “the utopian particular that has been buried underneath the universal” (*ND* 318). Such unearthing of the utopian particular does not entail a wholesale rejection of our conceptual apparatus, rather, it implies the becoming fuller of the subject, in contradistinction to the subject’s hypostatization which renders it less than it is. By reconciling with the object via concepts, the subject becomes more: “The subject is the more the less it is, and it is less the more it credits itself with objective being” (*AR* 149). Moreover, the unearthing of the utopian particular, for Adorno, is the reorientation of our conceptual apparatus back into the infinite givenness of the object, which also means the acknowledgement of the object’s reliance on the concept, for the “object, too, is mediated; but according to its own concept” (*AR* 143). Furthermore, “[t]he object, though enfeebled, cannot be without a subject either. If the object lacked the moment of subjectivity, its

own objectivity would become nonsensical" (AR 149).⁷⁴ In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno refers to this reconciliation and reciprocation between subject and object as "cognitive utopia": the "use of concepts to unseal the non-conceptual with concepts, without making it their equal" (ND 10).⁷⁵

The recovery of experience, therefore, presupposes cognitive utopia; in this sense, "experience," for Adorno, means the unsealing or disclosure of the non-identical with concepts without the total subsumption of the objects by the concepts. The mimetic moment is, therefore, crucial for the recovery of experience, since mimesis entails precisely the conceptual formation of our lifeworld. But mimesis, as Adorno and Horkheimer emphatically maintain, is Janus-faced, it is the process through which we open ourselves up to the world and, at the same time, also the process of domination. In other words, mimesis is the fulcrum of experience, at the same time as it is the

⁷⁴ Put another way: "If the subject does have an objective core, the object's subjective qualities are so much more an element of objectivity. For it is only as something definite that the object becomes anything at all. In the attributes that seem to be attached to it by the subject alone, the subject's own objectivity comes to the fore . . ." (AR 143).

⁷⁵ In spite of the conventional Habermasian reaction to the subject-object relation, as discussed above, there is an attempt in the recent literature of Adornoian scholarship to rehabilitate Adorno's revisionist subject-object model. We can consider the following commentators to have paid special attention to this aspect of Adorno's enterprise: J. M. Bernstein, Yvonne Sherratt, Michael Marder, and Deborah Cook. There are, of course, obvious differences in their individual accounts, but they are all keen enough to acknowledge the radicality and critical soundness of Adorno's account of the subject-object relation. See J. M. Bernstein, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Yvonne Sherratt, *Adorno's Positive Dialectic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Michael Marder, "On Adorno's 'Subject and Object,'" in *Telos*, 126 (Winter 2003), 41-52; and Deborah Cook, "From the Actual to the Possible: Non-identity Thinking," in *Adorno and the Need in Thinking: New Critical Essays* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007). An earlier defense of the importance of the subject-object relation in Adorno's project is found in Gillian Rose, *The Melancholy Science: An Introduction to the Thought of Theodor W. Adorno* (Hong Kong: The Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1978).

dissimulated blockage of experience. As pointed out above, experience becomes impoverished when thought remains “captivated” or trapped in the “spell” of identity thinking, or mastery over the object. Again, Nietzsche and Adorno are one in the observation that the spell of identity thinking governs even our most ordinary use of language; it is in our day-to-day dealings with objects, our day-to-day use of words to manipulate these objects, where we let concepts subsume objects: the status quo dictates us to prefer homogeneity over heterogeneity, uniformity over variety, unity over diversity, sameness over difference. Indeed, Adorno argues that the kind of thinking imposed on us by the status quo is the very opposite of dialectical thought: “Conceptual order is content to screen what thinking seeks to comprehend” (ND 5). J. M. Bernstein explains this point further:

Routine concept application, where concepts are possessed and the world routine and law-like in its presentation of phenomena, would seem to *not* call into operation our capacity for reflective judging. Ordinary perceptual judgement only wants from the object judged its familiarity, its fit within the conceptual order as a step within practical life . . .⁷⁶

The non-dialectical character of identity thinking blocks reason’s self-reflection, thereby failing to open up and be receptive to the non-identical character of objects. The ubiquity and obliviousness of the everyday aggravates the damaged life; the everyday impoverishes experience because it unwittingly submits to an unquestioned conceptual order at the expense of

⁷⁶ Bernstein, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics*, 315.

new possibilities—the familiar becomes the order of the day. To shift from an epistemological account of the subject-object relation to a more macroscopic account, an instance of ubiquity of the familiar, according to Adorno, is the fetishization of music and the regression in listening in an administered or commodified society, where liking is the same as recognizing the familiar: “no more choices are made . . . no one demands the subjective justification of the conventions,” since the “familiarity of the piece is a surrogate for the quality ascribed to it,” hence, “the charms become dulled and furnish models of the familiar” (CI 29-30, 33). Here, Adorno provides us an example of how the pathological instantiation of mimesis occurs in society. Experience is relegated to the mediation of a reified conceptual order, i.e., show business. The experience (or non-experience) of listening is mediated by music charts, sales, and the manufactured image of the artist, instead of the subjective, that is to say, the personal involvement of the listener with the music; in more theoretical terms, the receptivity of the subject to the object. In this sense, experience is impoverished since the mimetic experience is itself mediated by a conceptual order that has everything to do with the *production* of music, but does not have anything to do with its *creation*.

Adorno perceives the possibility of reconciliation in the shared material basis of subject and object: the body. The body is the fulcrum through which and from which the subject makes sense of his spatio-

temporal world. As such, Nietzsche and Adorno converge again in this cognitive-mimetic function of the body. There is a certain affinity between Nietzsche's ontological supposition that the will-to-truth emerges as a self-regulating process of a unity of irreducible somatic forces from which consciousness emerges as an aggregate,⁷⁷ and Adorno's claim that "Consciousness is a function of the living subject . . ." (ND 185). Nietzsche argues that judgment can only occur after the "process of assimilation" has already taken place:

There could be no judgments at all if a kind of equalization were not practiced within sensations: memory is possible only with a continual emphasizing of what is already familiar, experienced. Before judgment occurs, the process of assimilation must already have taken place; thus, here, too, there is an intellectual activity that does not enter consciousness, as pain does as a consequence of a wound (WP 352).

Then, Adorno:

Both body and mind are abstractions of their experience . . .
.. All mental things are modified physical impulses, and such modification is their qualitative recoil into what not

⁷⁷ Deleuze takes note of Nietzsche's point of departure: "What is the body? We do not define it by saying that it is a field of forces, a nutrient medium fought over by a plurality of forces. For in fact there is no 'medium', no field of forces or battle. There is no quantity of reality, all reality is already quantity of force. There is nothing but quantities of force in mutual 'relations of tension . . .'. Every force is related to others and it either obeys or commands. What defines a body is this relation between dominant and dominated forces. Every relationship of forces constitutes a body – whether it is chemical, biological, social or political. Any two forces, being unequal, constitute a body as soon as they enter into a relationship. This is why the body is always the fruit of chance, in the Nietzschean sense, and appears as the most 'astonishing' thing, much more astonishing, in fact, than consciousness and spirit. . . . Being composed of a plurality of irreducible forces the body is a multiple phenomenon, its unity is that of a multiple phenomenon, a 'unity of domination'." *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 39-40.

merely “is.” . . . The supposed basic facts of consciousness are something other than mere facts of consciousness. In the dimension of pleasure and displeasure they are invaded by a physical moment. All pain and all negativity, the moving forces of dialectical thinking, assume the variously conveyed, sometimes unrecognizable form of physical things, just as all happiness aims at sensual fulfillment and obtains its objectivity in that fulfillment. A happiness blocked off from every such aspect is not happiness. . . . Conscious unhappiness is not a delusion of the mind’s vanity but something inherent in the mind, the one authentic dignity it has received in its separation from the body. This dignity is the mind’s negative reminder of its physical aspect; its capability of that aspect is the only source of whatever hope the mind can have (*ND* 202-2-203).

Like Nietzsche, Adorno maintains that the transcendent characteristic of subjectivity is a byproduct of a logical construct (*AR* 149), and that what is often neglected by idealist philosophies is the utterly material or physical origin of constitutive subjectivity. Both Nietzsche and Adorno emphasize the primacy of the body over the mind, the mind being dependent on the body, the production of the transcendent mind being its ultimate separation from its material origin. In Chapter Two, we considered Nietzsche’s argument that the body-mind dualism, characteristic of Western philosophy, is a complication of the metaphysical bias of fear of temporality. In this context, what lies behind the history of constitutive subjectivity (the de-historicized subject) is the metaphysical fear of becoming—this fear is symptomatic of idealism’s forgetfulness of the mind’s essential, yet dissimulated bond, with the body, purporting to accord a privileged status

to the mind. Meanwhile, Adorno looks into the situation from the standpoint of the mind's alienation from its very own beginning and self-consciousness; he maintains that the metaphysical separation of mind and body, that is, forgetfulness of the mind of its somatic origin, is the real cause of the mind's unhappiness. Nevertheless, Adorno also points out, in almost existential parlance, that it is precisely this feeling of unhappiness—the feeling of separation from the body—that is the mind's negative reminder of a sense of reconciliation; such self-consciousness is necessarily unhappy. Reconciliation is, therefore, the ultimate struggle of the mind to break free from its alienated state. From this, we could infer, following Adorno, that the drama of reconciliation is not simply the overcoming of the violence inflicted on the object, but, more precisely, the overcoming of the violence inflicted on the mind—on the subject. Such violence can be gleaned from the hypostatization of the mimicked character of the object (body), turning subjectivity (mind) inwards; the forgetfulness of this somatic encounter is the actualization of this violence.

Mimesis is another word for the metaphorical organization of language. The metaphorical structure of language mimics the somatic coordination of the body's competing drives. Mimesis, *ipso facto*, is the possibility of experience. To say that metaphorical language is linked to the body is to say that the body is an interpretative medium. What we consider as the sphere of reality is "constituted" and "interpreted" by our bodily

drives—they “co-create” and “comport the very objects of our experience.”⁷⁸

This is the point raised in Chapter Two, the metaphorical constitution of our experience, language as essentially somatic. What we learn from both Nietzsche and Adorno is that mimesis or the metaphorical organization of language, as an expression of the will, is what lies behind affective experience, what lies behind subjectivity. Hence, the recovery of the mimetic drive is, therefore, the recovery of experience. Moreover, the mimetic moment or language, inasmuch as it is metaphorical, has always been informed by its aesthetic content. The recovery of experience entails a recovery of the aesthetic, which, in turn, entails the subject’s reorientation into the body.

Cognitive utopia can only be a recovery of experience by seeking to recover our senses. Once more, we learn to listen to our bodies as locales of mimetic moments. Moreover, it is cognitive utopia precisely because it seeks to reconcile mind and body, subject and object. Acknowledging the mimetic or metaphorical basis of language does not mean, for either Nietzsche or Adorno, that our assimilation or creation of an external world is thoroughly driven by our unconscious somatic drives (Nietzsche) or the non-identical objects (Adorno). Rather, the assimilated or created world is both a product

⁷⁸ Kristen Brown, *Nietzsche and Embodiment: Discerning Bodies and Non-dualisms* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006), 15.

of our “conscious ideological positioning”⁷⁹ or conceptual apparatus and the non-identical, unconscious, material forces. The assimilation or creation of a world is, therefore, a socio-historical process, for it involves the material social, political, and historical conditions surrounding and, hence, constituting the subject’s lifeworld. To put it differently, “the limits and possibilities of the body’s coordination of somatic drives is also shaped according to our present persuasion of belief concerning the world.”⁸⁰ So—although subject and object are infinitely incommensurate, since it is part of the meaning of subject to be an object, yet not part of the object to be a subject (ND 183)—Adorno is justified in claiming that the recovery of the object, that is of experience, emphatically depends on a renewal of our conceptual sensibilities; that the object, at this point in time, cannot do without the subject. In this sense, in cognitive utopia, the object is not virulently subsumed by the subject, nor is the subject irrevocably dissolved in the object; moreover, cognitive utopia displaces the Habermasian worry that any talk of subject and object merely reinforces the view that reason can only manifest in history as objectification or instrumentalization. Contrary to Habermas’ claim, what cognitive utopia seeks is reason’s reconciliation with nature, the redemption of both through mimesis. Kompridis illustrates this point very clearly:

⁷⁹ Cf. Claudia Crawford, “Nietzsche’s Physiology of Ideological Criticism,” in *Nietzsche as Postmodernist* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), 164.

⁸⁰ Colin Hearfield, *Adorno and the Modern Ethos of Freedom* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2004), 59.

In taking the position of the “object,” the “subject” is not abandoning its subjectivity (or responsibility); that follows only from the premises of the standard subject-object framework. Rather, the “subject” is engaged in a mimetic or receptive act through which it can encounter the “object” in nonobjectifying, noninstrumental way, putting itself in a position where it can see itself through the “object’s” eyes (CD 104).

Hence, the principle that animates cognitive utopia is receptivity, but not simply intersubjective receptivity, but, rather, also receptivity to the infinitely given, yet silent object. This notion of receptivity also implies the possibility of providing a voice to the voiceless person or thing. The rehabilitation of this receptivity finds its way by reorienting ourselves to how our bodies function in the cognitive process and how this cognitive process cannot do without language. We have to realize, moreover, the deeply metaphorical or aesthetic character of our use of language, for indeed we live in an aesthetically *created* world. Like Nietzsche, Adorno undermines the idealist priority given to transcendental reason and, instead, like Nietzsche, rethinks the role of our bodily drives in the formation of our experiences and how these drives shape consciousness. Thus, both Nietzsche and Adorno converge in viewing mental processes as epiphenomenal. But the point of cognitive utopia is not simply to expose the reified state of our conceptual apparatus, but, more importantly, the revival of concepts via concepts that are oriented towards providing the non-identical the voice of reason. The voice of reason that cognitive utopia

advocates is not trapped within a copy-bound or representational mimetic model, one which replaces the particularity or individuality of objects with identity (*ND* 173), but, rather, it is a type of reason that highlights the affective formation of consciousness and, as such, leaves room for a mimetic model that is open to the infinite givenness and non-conceptuality of objects. The upshot of the latter notion of reason is that it does not unwittingly paralyze conceptual thinking and becomes more akin to “the spontaneity of the subject”; for our access to objects, Adorno intimates, is not the “spiritual silence of integral administration,” but, rather, in “the subjective surplus in thought” (*ND* 205). It is, therefore, not the goal of cognitive utopia to sever ties with language: “to abolish language in thought is not to demythologize thought. Along with language, philosophy would blindly sacrifice whatever is not merely significative in dealing with its object . . .” (*ND* 56). Thinking, according to Adorno, is dialectical precisely because of language—“Dialectics—literally: language as the organon of thought”—and, in accordance to Nietzsche’s revival of the deeply seated metaphorical structure of language, Adorno also views dialectics as the attempt to critically rescue the “rhetorical element” in thought (*ND* 56); and as with the subject-object dialectic, this critical rescue of the rhetorical in thought, moreover, entails “a mutual approximation of thing and expression” (*ND* 56) and, as such, dialectical language only seeks to appropriate the world metaphorically, always on guard against thought’s relapse to myth.

In his posthumously published *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, Adorno asserts that “*The power of negative dialectics is the power of whatever is not realized in the thing itself*” (LND 178). The “surplus of thought,” mentioned earlier, is the “not realized” and, for Adorno, this “negativity” in thought provides a more dignified and receptive space for the unfolding or disclosure of “objectivity.” But here, objectivity means “infinite givenness,” *exhaustibility*, as opposed to identity. The ethical role of philosophy is to maintain the dialectical in thought, more precisely, language’s ability to separate “*thought and object just as much as it is capable of being mobilized against separation*” (LND 181). Negative dialectics receptivity to objectivity—one of constant and open conceptual expression of objectivity, at the same time not letting the conceptual take over or, in a word, “reconciliation,”—is the “utopian” image of cognition, an utopian image that is precisely the “ethical” struggle of thinking.

Chapter Nine: Possibility, Aesthetic Experience, and the Damaged Life

The preceding discussions on the themes on philosophical praxis and the role of language, the practice of critical theory, and the reinscription of the non-identical set the ground for this last chapter where I shall attempt to tackle the possibility of aesthetic experience, which, for both Nietzsche and Adorno, is an indispensable aspect of our openness to objects. I will demonstrate that the ethics of thinking is linked to aesthetic experience inasmuch as the redemptive dimension of mimesis is only gleaned from an emphatic immersion into damaged life. The experience of damaged life brings to the fore the moments of critical disclosure, possibility and creativity, and redemption.

The discussion of cognitive utopia in the preceding chapter allows us to interpret negative dialectics as the unfolding of the ethical content of thinking. Such ethical import, as intimated above, is receptive to the role of language as mimetic link between subject and object, the reconciliatory relation between our conceptual apparatus and the infinite and non-identical givenness of the world. What all these amount to for Adorno is our receptivity to “possibility,” as he declares in *Negative Dialectics*:

The means employed in negative dialectics for the penetration of its hardened objects is possibility—the possibility of which their reality has cheated the objects and which is nonetheless visible in each one. But no matter how hard we try for linguistic expression of such a history congealed in things, the words we use will remain concepts (ND 52-53).

As receptivity to possibility, negative dialectics maintains the “gap between words and the things they conjure” (*ND* 53). Possibility is, therefore, thought’s own self-consciousness of its very own conceptuality, that is to say, of its very own fallibility. Part of thought’s self-awareness is also the realization that objects or particularities in reality—that is, in how these objects or particularities are presented to us by our present historico-ideological situation—appear false or damaged. For Adorno, the possible or the not-yet inheres in objects or particularities inasmuch as they are conceptually presented as incomplete. In this sense, the revival or, in some cases, the creation of utopian energies rests on the painful recognition of the incompleteness of the object. While identitarian thought only perceives or is under the specious impression of perceiving non-contradiction between subject and object, non-identitarian thought perceives contradiction between subject and object; in this sense, non-identitarian critique or negative dialectics attempts at “identifying acts of judgment whether the concept does justice to what it covers, and whether the particular fulfills its concept” (*ND* 146). What is hoped for in this dialectically non-identitarian notion of justice is both the disclosure of the “pernicious supremacy” of reified concepts in our day-to-day activities, on the one hand, and the realization that the present configuration of objects or particularities in society falls short of the objects’ concepts (see *ND* 199), on the other hand. An example for this is how capitalism manifests itself in the current state of society as the very

failure to fulfill its own concept. In other words, possibility or utopia inheres in damaged life inasmuch as the disclosure of the wrong state of things rekindles, albeit painfully, our receptivity to possibility. To rehearse a claim already made in Chapter Six, critical theory as critical disclosure reveals the falsified way we perceive society normatively structured by the wrong state of things. In his lecture series *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, delivered in 1963, Adorno announced that the only decent, by which he perhaps means earnest, way of confronting the reality of the wrong state of things is not by promising that a good life is possible in a bad life, but, rather, “by making this situation a matter of consciousness—rather than covering it up with sticking plaster,” for only then would “it be possible to create the conditions in which we can properly formulate questions about how we should lead our lives today” (*PMP* 167). By bringing the damaged life into our consciousness, we also become conscious of conceptual fallibility or the finitude of our epistemological and moral categories. Such consciousness will be a constant reminder of thought’s indebtedness to objects and, at the same time, thought’s reorientation into *responsible* spontaneity.

Adorno’s notion of possibility, therefore, goes beyond the simple restoration of the thoroughly material subject-object dialectic. Or, said another way, he goes beyond a simple epistemological account of the dialectic; the emphatically ethical content of Adorno’s critique of the wrong state of things reverberates in his revision of the subject-object dialectic.

Therefore, thinking, in this light, is ethical because it is receptive to the *decency* of emphatically acknowledging what is wrong, yet it is also negative. It is negative in two senses: first, because it refuses to posit normative finality and maintains a pathos of distance from the object and, second, because it admits to being contaminated by the damaged life, yet perceives in damaged life the possibility of negative utopia. Thus, for Adorno, positivity or, better yet, redemption inheres in the negative, in the non-identical; the meaning of utopia is only conceivable against the background of dystopia, or as Adorno phrases it in "Critique": "the false, once determinately known and precisely expressed, is already an index of what is right and better" (CM 288). He arrives at the same conclusion in "Resignation": "The universal tendency of oppression is opposed to thought as such. Thought is happiness, even where it defines unhappiness: by enunciating it" (CM 293).

"Ungroundable hope" is a metaphorical phrase used by Nicholas H. Smith to capture the redemptive content of negative dialectics; Smith observes that the basic thrust of critical theory is "hope for a better world."⁸¹ But, as we have seen, the ethical element of hope, for Adorno, is its negativity or its refusal to posit any positivistic or rational justification for why we should hope for something better. Following Richard Rorty, Smith contends that critical theory, in this case Adorno, does not intend to block off

⁸¹ See Nicholas H. Smith, "Hope and Critical Theory," in *Critical Horizons*, 6:1 (2005), 45-61.

hope, but, rather, it gains more critical leverage from its “skepticism” about hope’s “rational groundability” and “attentiveness to the contingency” of the fulfillment of hope; these are, Smith notes, “just what we need to have hope,” that is, the reactivation of our “utopian imagination while advocating meliorism” without falling into the trap of the “metaphysical notion of utopia as transfigured humanity.”⁸² If we follow the theoretical and practical implications of ungroundable hope, then we begin to understand that “uncertainty” is the most certain and potent aspect of possibility. Negative dialectics, then, emerges as a reminder of ungroundable hope; and, in the context of the subject-object dialectic, negative dialectics is able to disclose a notion of social responsibility that is deeply rooted in the historicity of damaged life.

The above discussion of possibility brings us to the issue of the *possibility* of possibility in a damaged life. I argue that Adorno’s (and Nietzsche’s) answer is clear: “aesthetic experience” bears the weight of possibility. It was noted in the preceding discussions that negative dialectics is able to *respond* to the still unrealized possibilities that the non-identical offers—even more emphatically, and historically so, in the current state of a damaged life. So, like Nietzsche who pushes the notion of nihilism to its conceptual limits so as to overcome it, Adorno, for his part, conceives the

⁸² *Ibid.*, 55. Also see Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999).

critical-ethical element of thinking immanently within the damaged life and uses it as a springboard to conceive of possibilities fueled by utopian hope. In this context, Deborah Cook is correct in insisting that possibility in Adorno always contains a “speculative dimension”⁸³ or, as Adorno puts it, the conceptual can “capture the immortal only in the configurations of the mortal” (*LND* 76). This means that thinking the non-identical remains conceptual; but since the conceptual is now recast as mortal, as fallible, the subject retains his or her freedom to step outside the fringes of a given conceptual framework—rigidity is, thus, dissolved. Thought maintains its distance from the conjured object and, with the infinite givenness or “undiminished multiplicity” (*LND* 76) of the object as its guide, points to still undisclosed possibilities: “It opens itself up to them in all earnestness, does not use them as a mirror, does not confuse its own reflection with the concrete realities” (*LND* 76). The ethical content of thought is the “pathos of distance,” to use a Nietzschean phrase in a more or less re-contextualized form, that thinking maintains as it confronts objects—the receptivity to the “otherness” of objects—a gesture that resists the temptation of identity. In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno, borrowing a curious term from Walter Benjamin, refers to this pathos of distance as the “aura” of an object, in particular, of an artwork: “Aura is not only . . . the here and now of the artwork, it is

⁸³ Deborah Cook, “From the Actual to the Possible: Non-identity Thinking,” in *Adorno and the Need in Thinking: New Critical Essays* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 170-171.

whatever goes beyond its factual givenness, its content; one cannot abolish it and still want art" (AT 56).⁸⁴ He writes, moreover: "The distance of the aesthetic realm from that of practical aims appears inner-aesthetically as the distance of aesthetic objects from the observing subject" (AT 392). As such, for Adorno, the "aesthetic distance" instantiated by the aura of a work of art, or any object for that matter, is the "primary condition for any closeness to the content of works" (AT 392). The experience of the aura, which for Adorno is the locus of aesthetic experience, opens up the subject to "interpretation" and "receptivity."⁸⁵

In the context of Adorno's concept of aesthetic experience, Yvonne Sherratt provides us schematic definitions of "interpretation" and "receptivity." Interpretation is "the act of applying and reapplying concepts to a work of art in order to attempt to make a judgment as to what the work of art portrays";⁸⁶ while receptivity is defined as the "act of aesthetic engagement" which elicits something distinctive in the object.⁸⁷ The "mortal" act of interpretation—the use and reuse of concepts for critical disclosure—is the dignified consequence of the subject's receptivity to the "immortal" aura, immortal only because it is precisely what escapes our

⁸⁴ Benjamin defines aura "as the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be. If, while resting on a summer afternoon, you follow with your eyes a mountain range on the horizon or a branch which casts its shadow over you, you experience the aura of those mountains, of that branch." *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 222-223.

⁸⁵ Cf. Yvonne Sherratt, "Adorno's Aesthetic Concept of Aura," in *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 33:2 (2007), 160.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 166.

conceptual apparatus. The act of interpretation, therefore, entails continuous and untiring configurative shifts—for, in every, act of interpretation, our conceptual apparatus should give justice to what is given and, still, be open to the fleeting “enigma” of whatever object or artwork that is in sight. Receptivity, in this sense, is the capacity to point beyond the determinate givenness of an object. Receptivity is, therefore, an ambivalent gesture, for, as an “act of aesthetic engagement,” it entails distance and proximity—it is only by maintaining the auratic distance between subject and object that conceptual justice is given to the object and, in return, the subject is opened to the non-identical givenness of the object. Once more, we perceive the relation between subject and object as reciprocal and reconciliatory, but not necessarily positivistically communicative. Conceptual thinking’s powerlessness over the enigmatic character of objects, or what Adorno refers to as the “fracturedness” of objects (*AT* 167), is the non-identical that persistently escapes thinking. Ultimately, Adorno imagines the possibility of cognitive utopia in our receptivity to the enigmatic, auratic givenness of objects; indeed cognitive utopia is best embodied in the experience of an artwork, inasmuch as the experience, which also presupposes the conceptual or linguistic operation of the mind as a normative point of departure, allows the unfolding of the non-identical to conceptual contemplation—for Adorno, the experience of the non-identical is the disclosure of the *incompleteness* of thinking, but, ultimately, the experience of the object’s “remainder”:

“Artworks that unfold to contemplation and thought without any remainder are not artworks” (AT 161). What is stressed in auratic distance is the irreducibility of the mediatory or mimetic structure of aesthetic experience and, I argue, of experience in general; mimesis, for Adorno, is the bearer of aesthetic experience:

Mimetic comportment—an attitude toward reality distinct from the fixated antithesis of subject and object—is seized in art—the organ of mimesis since the mimetic taboo—by semblance and, as the complement to the autonomy of form, becomes its bearer (AT 145).

Here, Nietzsche and Adorno converge in stressing the thoroughly mediatory structure of mimesis. As opposed to Plato, who like Habermas proposes a stark opposition between aesthetic experience and reason, both Nietzsche and Adorno refuse to give up on the ethical and epistemological dimensions of aesthetic experience. While both Nietzsche and Adorno reject Plato’s representational model of mimesis or “mimetic taboo,” they both locate in the mediatory space created by aesthetic experience an emphatic expression of ethical sensibility. Nietzsche’s emphasis on the irreducibility of somatic drives as the epiphenomenal content of our cognitive faculty allows us to conceive of affective experience as a “transfigurative mimetic relation”⁸⁸ between subject and object. Like Adorno, Nietzsche shifts from a copy-based or representational mimetic model to a mimetic model that

⁸⁸ Cf. Colin Hearfield, *Adorno and the Modern Ethos of Freedom* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2004), 60.

emphasizes the active participation of the subject; in Adorno, this is the subject's receptivity and act of interpretation. In "On Truth and Lies," Nietzsche writes:

. . . between two absolutely different spheres, as between subject and object, there is no causality, no correctness, and no expression; there is, at most, an *aesthetic* relation: I mean, a suggestive transference, a stammering translation into a completely foreign tongue—for which, there is required, in any case, a freely inventive intermediate sphere and mediating force (TL I, 86).

In Chapter Two, we have seen how Nietzsche's theory of language accounts for the metaphorical transfiguration of objects into language. In opposition to a metaphysical notion of reality, Nietzsche reorients us to a conception of a world mediated by language, and he describes this mediation as socially motivated and historically situated. So, while our perspectival image of the world is normatively grounded in metaphorical language, it is precisely our recognition of the metaphorical nature of language that provides leeway for perspectival shifts or *creativity* in our value judgments. Meanwhile, we could interpret Adorno's conception of mimesis as the opening up of the subject to the object, and vice-versa. By following the implications of the auratic givenness of the object, we get an insight into the proximate distance created in the relation, which, for Adorno, allows the subject to form a spontaneous aesthetic attitude or disposition towards the object. In "The Actuality of Philosophy," Adorno borrows a phrase from Francis Bacon, "*ars inveniendi*" (art of invention), to

scaffold what he terms as an “exact fantasy,” a process of generation and regeneration, configuration and reconfiguration, of the subject’s knowledge of the object (AR 36-37).⁸⁹ In this context, we could further construe aesthetic experience as receptivity to the material constitution of the object, which demands from the subject an “exactness” of judgment, and then receptivity to the infinite givenness of the object, which creates a space for a spontaneity-inspired interpretive stance or, in other words, a provision for “fantasy” or “imagination.” Subject-object reciprocity could, therefore, be understood as a process wherein the subject charts the object, as it were a tourist in a strange town or city, while concepts and their constellations function like a tourist’s map. In this analogy, it is clear that a map does not measure up to everything in the actual town or city; one could discover the most interesting parts of town while actually strolling and perhaps ignoring the map. Affective experience (Nietzsche) or aesthetic experience (Adorno) is guided by the conceptual mechanism of language, as it were a map, but its language should not be construed to be bound to an a priori *ratio*. While any a priori *ratio* can always be posited by idealist philosophy *only* in principle, experience’s resistance to any a priori given is an *actual* or material phenomenon. In this context, thinking can only be “ethical” when it attunes

⁸⁹ For a book length study of this notion, see Shierry Weber Nicholse, *Exact Imagination, Late Work: On Adorno’s Aesthetics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1997). For a similar interpretation to that of mine, compare Hearfield, *Adorno and the Modern Ethos of Freedom*, 61. Also see Michael Cahn, “Subversive Mimesis: Theodor W. Adorno and the Modern Impasse of Critique,” in *Mimesis in Contemporary Theory: An Interdisciplinary Approach* (Chapel Hill: John Benjamins Publishing Co, 1985), 27-64.

itself to the non-identical resistance of objective experience—and, by doing so, it avails itself of an “imagined” freedom from its own rigidifying tendency. There is, in principle, as transmutation of priorities—the infinite givenness of the object takes over the subject, but this is precisely what is needed to feed our imagination or fantasy. In other words, while the primacy of the object remains, the emergence of “meaning” depends on the mimetic encounter between subject and object, that is to say, the imaginative dimension of aesthetic experience elicits meaning. In a more socio-political context, this refers to our ability to imagine or fantasize about something *other* than a damaged life.

From the foregoing discussion, we could connect three interrelated moments which emerge from the relation between aesthetic experience and the ethics of thinking: these are the moments of 1) critical disclosure, 2) possibility and creativity, and 3) redemption. Our experience of a damaged life can lead us to nihilism (Nietzsche) or conformism (Adorno); but from the standpoint of critical disclosure, such experience should strike a critical and ethical chord within us. Our receptivity to the implications of a damaged life should be able to disclose social injustices as pathological turns in our normative ideals. In the current state of things in society, damaged life leaves its indelible mark; but it is precisely the experience of wreckage that we are able to imagine a non-transcendent beyond, that is, ungroundable hope. In other words, the traumatic experience of damaged life fuels our

imagined leap towards or wager for “change”—but this is a leap or wager not understood in the theological sense suggested by Kierkegaard and Pascal. The leap or wager will always be immanent and dialectically grounded in social and historical structures—for, as opposed to Hegel, these social and historical structures could also be deemed as the *other* or non-identical element of thought. The new ethical imperative for thinking is its indebtedness to and constant dialogue with society and history. Our discussions of Nietzsche’s genealogical method and Adorno- and Horkheimer’s ideology critique in the preceding chapters aim to show that these philosophical frameworks best exemplify critical disclosure’s receptivity to social pathologies and historical situatedness, while, at the same time, recognizing the indelible contribution of language in the formation of our normative standards/perspectives/knowledge. Critical disclosure hones our receptivity to possibility (e.g., the possible circumvention of social injustice) and, hence, to aesthetic creativity. We have seen above how the auratic distance between subject and object creates a space for possibility, for the thinking of the not-yet or the imagination of that which usually escapes our normative conceptual frameworks. The honing of receptivity promised by critical disclosure, in the context of Adorno, means our receptivity to the object of experience and our openness to the “new.” Finally, the recovery of experience, which involves a deeply aesthetic dimension as we have seen above, revives our sensibility towards hope: it

provides a standpoint from which alienation and suffering in a totally rationalized, administered, and damaged society can be gleaned from the standpoint of social redemption—or, at least, the imagination of an emphatic image of freedom. Ultimately, what such imagination entails is a new way of responding to difference or what we usually refer to as the oblique “other.”

EPILOGUE

ARTICULATING AN ETHICS OF THINKING

The overarching aim of this thesis has been to articulate a philosophical notion of an ethics of thinking through the works of Friedrich Nietzsche and Theodor Adorno. I described the task not as a conventional comparative study of these thinkers, but, rather an *experimentation with* their key ideas in order to construct a, more or less, idiosyncratic notion of philosophical praxis, which I have argued is grounded in the ethical dimension of thinking. Against orthodox Marxism and Habermas, I consider the Nietzsche-Adorno relation important for the reinvention of critical theory because of their keen and emphatic critique of the philosophical enterprise. Making this relation more explicit is key to the revitalization of the Frankfurt School, which, as we have already seen, has been more receptive to the critical potential of Nietzsche's cultural criticism during the pre-Habermasian period of the Institute of Social Research. We have seen that despite Adorno's selective appropriation of Nietzschean ideas, he was able to highlight the important aspects of Nietzsche's works that significantly contributed to the molding of what I have referred to in this thesis as early critical theory; this reception of Nietzsche culminated in the publication of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the most Nietzschean in spirit among the major texts of the early Frankfurt School. I am hopeful that this present study has shown the relevance of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in

contemporary social critique, especially when read in light of the critical force of Nietzschean genealogy. Thanks to the recent writings of Axel Honneth and Nikolas Kompridis, we are now at a better position to support this claim, that is, that we are able to recast Nietzsche's contribution to the revitalization of critical theory via emphasizing the importance of genealogy and reinventing it in light of critical disclosure.

By way of conclusion, I will now articulate in more explicit terms a philosophical notion of an ethics of thinking I have been developing in stages via Nietzsche and Adorno. The strongest link between Nietzsche and Adorno is their unrelenting and invective critique of reason, embodied either in nihilism (Nietzsche) or ideology (Adorno). But, while many of their critics, like Habermas, accuse them of some sort of performative contradiction, I would like to argue that such performative contradiction is necessary if only to make a disclosive point about the hubristic tendency of reason and that the exposure of reason's hubris is actually a gesture of salvaging reason. Explicating what I refer to as the "ethics of thinking" presupposes such stance.

What Adorno calls the confusion between what "persists" and what "perishes" by philosophers is referred to by Nietzsche as the "metaphysical bias"—the confusion between the "last" and the "first," viz., the confusion between the concept and object. According to Nietzsche and Adorno, this confusion has permeated the Western philosophical tradition and, indeed,

how we commonly understand our cognitive processes. What Nietzsche and Adorno are basically arguing is that, if we take this confusion for granted, then we also take for granted its most dangerous and surreptitious implication, i.e., nihilism or ideology. Our predisposition towards inviolable universal categories (Nietzsche) or concept fetishism (Adorno) has profoundly informed and remains deeply ingrained in our normative practices. The deconstruction of our normative practices, from the standpoint of damaged life, is the *conditio sine qua non* of the “ethics of thinking.” As a deconstructive stance, the ethics of thinking’s emphatic mission is the search for new ways of *responding* to crises. This is only possible if thinking itself acknowledges the profound influence of the other upon thought; failure to listen or pay heed to the call of the other is a betrayal of the imperative implied in the ethics of thinking.

For Nietzsche, language by itself is already a “falsification” of the testimony of the senses. But like Adorno, Nietzsche also stresses the importance of rescuing thinking from *too much* falsification. Illusions are necessary, but only inasmuch as they are life-enhancing or are able to reinscribe within us the hope of a better life beyond the damaged one. For Adorno, this is possible only if thinking leaves enough space for imagination to flourish and inform our search for new ways of thinking; that is, responding to nature and its objects, including us humans. By allowing itself to provide provisions for change, thinking, to borrow a line from William

Connolly, “participates in that uncertain process by which new possibilities are ushered into being,”¹ which entails thinking’s struggle to courageously challenge the established order, that is, to go beyond the bounds of the common, the safe. This participation in uncertainty is performed when thinking begins to understand that the tentativeness of concepts is actually an affirmative aspect of knowledge formation. Ultimately, in this sense, the highest form of *learning* is *unlearning*, our ability to respond anew to the world. This performance is disclosive and, as opposed to the battle cry of the Habermasians, is not strictly a wholesale rejection of reason and truth. On the contrary, thinking’s performative participation in uncertainty broadens the domain of reason, thereby also broadening our conceptual capacities and our receptivity to new emerging “truths.” This is a point which Kompridis emphatically repeats throughout his *Critique and Disclosure*, stressing the “possibility of a new, practice-altering conception of reason” (CD 38), a conception of reason that has a bearing on how philosophy should consciously conduct itself. As for Nietzsche, Adorno, and, I now add, Kompridis, this new conception of reason is grounded in a profound sensibility to the role of language as a disclosive process and, as such, they articulate the ethical dimension of thinking, in the context of its “world-opening and world-transforming capacity” (CD 140). This, for Kompridis, is

¹ William Connolly, *Neuropolitics, Thinking, Culture, Speed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 1.

the emancipating or liberating factor of language, its ability to hover over “rigid meanings and the current space of possibility” (CD 140). As an ethical praxis, thinking guards itself from the error of solidification. Kompridis is also quick to point out that, “the course of such emancipation is not something over which we can exercise direct control of, since world-disclosing language is not language we can instrumentalize” (CD 140). But this non-instrumentality is something that we, as language users and agents of reason, should realize and consciously impose on ourselves; this is an ethical moment in thinking, a struggle which thinking will have to consider its responsibility; avoidance of (nihilism) or conformism to any higher authority, divine or otherwise, is a betrayal of thinking itself. To be able to conceive of ethical responsibility or accountability, we do not need to posit something divine, but, rather, we are accountable to the actual, yet non-identical, givenness of the here and now.

Nietzschean genealogy and ideology critique, as models of critical disclosure, do not simply dismiss rigidified normative standards, but, rather, they are emphatic criticisms of these commonly held and safeguarded normative standards; the exposure of social pathologies that emerge, often unnoticed, from these normative standards cannot be separated from the exploration of the still underdeveloped possibilities that are conditioned by the same normative standards. Thinking is, therefore, only ethical if it is able to think *with* and *against* a given social matrix, in dialogue with the

normative ideals cultivated within such social matrix. For example, we are only able to understand the meanings of “reason” or “Enlightenment” if we are able to think *with* and *against* their commonly accepted connotations. If the goal or vision of the ethics of thinking is “change,” then thinking should be able to *think differently*, for *to think the same* means *remaining the same*. Change requires our receptivity to our environment and its constant flux: call this reconciliation, mimesis, or Dionysian sensibility! It does not matter much which metaphor we use, what matters is the normative content of the metaphor we use: it should maintain a consciousness of the dialectical structure of our relation to our environment and should be able to envision new possibilities beyond instrumentalization.

Inasmuch as we are able to stress the ethical dimension of thinking, we are also able to link this to the practical task of philosophy, more precisely, the critical task of philosophy. Such critical task always has a bearing on our own self-understanding. The following passage from Foucault summarizes this point:

. . . that 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 recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying. . . . And this critique will be genealogical in the sense that it will not deduce from the form of what we are what it is impossible for us to do and to know; but it will separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think. It is not seeking to

make possible a metaphysics that has finally become a science; it is seeking to give new impetus, as far and wide as possible, to the undefined work of freedom.²

Foucault's observation could indeed be used for the purpose of further illustrating the implications of the ethics of thinking. Thinking is ethical because, as an act that is peculiar to us humans, a revised understanding of what constitutes thinking allows us to understand ourselves in ways that conventional identitarian thought could not. In this context, thinking is ethical because it is a way of relating to ourselves as agents of thought and of possibility. A further implication of this is that we come to understand change to be something within our reach, that is, within human possibility, as opposed to divine revelation.

With the invocation of the role of aesthetic experience, Nietzsche and Adorno are able to stress the somatic or material origin of thinking. By doing so, they revive a sensibility peculiar to the Romantic spirit: the bringing together of thinking and feeling. Like the early German Romantics, Nietzsche and Adorno are able to present their works as counterweight to the dispassionate stance of the Western tradition with regard to the nature of thinking. Nietzsche and Adorno represent the philosophical minority for claiming that thinking is inextricably related to, even originates from, feeling: the somatic and deeply aesthetic structure of cognition and experience. The

² Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," in *The Foucault Reader* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 45-46.

chorismos between subject and object, maintained by traditional idealist philosophy or metaphysics, makes it difficult for us to understand thinking as a deeply somatic activity, that is, as a kind of “doing” or “action,” indeed, as a kind of praxis. Both Nietzsche and Adorno emphasize the symbiotic relationship between thought and the world, one “touching” the other and vice-versa. This process of “touching” is the basis of reconciliatory change. Thinking and praxis, thus, converge. One could say even that thinking is a kind of praxis. The cultivation of new practices is the cultivation of new ways of relating to the world, disclosing hidden possibilities. As such, as a community of philosophers, we can consider this normative content of thinking as our new ethical imperative.

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