# Theodor Adorno and Anglophone Modernist Literature


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A thesis submitted for the degree of
*Doctor of Philosophy in English*

Trinity 2021

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# Abstract

Though studies of Adorno and literature have proliferated over the last 15 years, Adorno's engagement with Anglophone literature continues to be overlooked. This thesis seeks to remedy such an omission by outlining the importance of four Anglophone writers - Dickens, Joyce, Beckett and Huxley - to Adorno's wider philosophical project. I show how Adorno drew upon these writers' works and interpreted them in his own specific way as *modernist* texts – in other words, as texts that had an especially critical, cognitive quality that would allow him to discuss and potentially counteract the false consciousness promoted by the different stages of capitalism. In the first chapter, I establish how Adorno uses Dickens' novel *The Old Curiosity Shop* to propose a specific theory of allegory to resist reification in capitalist society. In the second chapter, I argue that Adorno should be understood as giving a powerful but tendentious reading of Joyce's novels *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. In the third chapter, I uncover how Beckett's *The Unnamable* and *Endgame* offer a paradoxical form of therapy for Adorno: their redemptive potential stems from their self-conscious failure to be consolatory texts. In the fourth and final chapter, I demonstrate how Adorno sees Huxley's *Brave New World* as a tool for resisting the culture industry's false consciousness because it promotes a kind of pleasure that opposes the false pleasures of capitalism. Overall, I aim to show the key role that Anglophone literature had in Adornian thought; it was both the source and object of his critical theory as well as a space that exposed the limits of its very place within his philosophy.

# Acknowledgements

I should begin by thanking the Frankfurt Adorno Archiv for their permission to quote from Adorno's archival materials and Dr. Susanne Willems for her permission to quote from Helms' estate in this doctoral thesis. I am especially grateful to Michael Schwarz for all his invaluable help at the Walter Benjamin Archiv at the Akademie der Künste in Berlin.

I would like to thank Hertford College and the Oxford English Faculty for my scholarship which made it possible to undertake my DPhil in the first place. Their respective travel grant schemes also enabled me to present my work at conferences and to visit the archives in Berlin. Warm thanks to my supervisor Professor David Dwan for his comments, supervision and rigour – my research has become stronger for it.

Many thanks to Grace for her mentorship and philosophy and to Matt Bevis, Rebecca Beasley and Adam Guy for their teaching mentorship. Mike Mayo, Jeri Johnson, Alexandra Paddock and many Oxford college staff deserve a special mention for all of the teaching that they have sent my way. And thank you to all of the students I've taught during the DPhil – you taught me a lot.

At Oxford, I have been lucky to have the friendship and solidarity of Talitha Slabbert, Felix Taylor, Ellen Brewster, Lloyd (Meadhbh) Houston, Ciarán Byrne, Hannah Greenstreet, Lucy Brookes, Luke Young and Amber Mainstone. I have also cherished meeting countless people at research events and conferences over the course of the doctorate - thank you all for being so incredibly welcoming.

Beyond Oxford University, I would like to thank those who supported my intellectual work and got me to where I am today as a scholar. At school, Mr Howell and Mr Crowley taught me the value and importance of an excellent, publicly funded education in English Literature, as well as the power of producing work that is "either nonsense or genius". Warwick's English Department introduced me to Adorno and enabled me to cut my teeth on theory. I must also thank the coffee shop baristas who kept me typing in Oxford, Manchester, London, Leamington Spa, Brussels, Antwerp, Nagoya, Kyoto, Tokyo, Amsterdam, Utrecht, Dublin, Belfast, Paris and Berlin.

All my thanks and my love to my Manchester, Warwick and Oxford friends, my family (from Warrington to Nagoya), my five sisters Holly, Elsa, Sarah, Mabel and Winnie, my honourable sister Grayling, and Henderson the rabbit – the best (and only) boy in the family. Your support means the world to me, even if you do say you have no idea what my research is about.

And finally, I dedicate this work to Rowan Fisher. For what I think in theory, he does in practice.

# Abbreviations

Please note that I have avoided abbreviating titles as acronyms within my in-text citations where possible. However, in the few cases where titles are unduly similar in the primary material, I have resorted to using acronyms to help distinguish between key texts. These are as follows:

**Adorno:**

| | |
|---|---|
| *AT* | *Aesthetic Theory* (English translation) |
| *MM* | *Minima Moralia* (English translation) |
| *ND* | *Negative Dialectics* (English translation) |
| *NTL1* | *Notes to Literature*, vol. 1 (English translation) |
| *NTL2* | *Notes to Literature*, vol. 2 (English translation) |

**Huxley:**

| | |
|---|---|
| *BNW* | *Brave New World* |
| *BNWR* | *Brave New World Revisited* |

## Introduction: Theodor Adorno and Anglophone Modernist Literature

On 20 January 1959, a PhD student named Peter F. Neumeyer at UC Berkeley's Department of English wrote to the famous theorist Theodor W. Adorno. After explaining that his doctoral research was investigating Thomas Mann's relation to England (and his English reception), Neumeyer asked Adorno if he could recall any of Mann's opinions on his relationship to England (TWAA 1079/1).[1] Adorno replied on 28 January 1959, writing in English:

> As far as I remember Thomas Mann never mentioned anything specific to me about his relations to England. The only detail I can recollect is that he expressed himself rather negatively about Somerset Maugham and that he showed high respect for Joyce. On the other hand his Hanseatic origin makes it very likely that he had rather a deeprooted affinity to England though his knowledge of the language appeared to me rather limited. […] If I may express my own humble opinion, I doubt very much whether a thesis on this subject would yield much – except, perhaps, an academic degree. Please give my kindest regards to Professor Watt. (TWAA 1079/2).

Although Adorno offers an incredibly dismissive assessment of Neumeyer's thesis topic, his observation of Thomas Mann's relationship to England, especially to English literature, broaches a subject that has been relatively neglected in Adornian Studies; even today, Adorno scholars' overwhelming focus on Adorno's interest in a European modernist culture has obscured his thoughts and relationship to Anglophone art and literature. As a result, this thesis seeks to address the relative neglect of Adorno's interest in Anglophone modernist writers in the existing scholarship, showing how Adorno drew upon writers such as Joyce to name and resist false consciousness.

From Adorno's early writings, he was concerned that capitalist society was driving false consciousness. For example, Adorno explores the problem of false consciousness in his 1931 lecture on Dickens' *The Old Curiosity Shop* – the subject of "Chapter 1". Adorno fully maps out his

[1] Please note that I have used slightly different in-text citations to distinguish the archival material I consulted from the other sources.

conceptualisation of false consciousness in *Negative Dialectics* [1966], where he argues that capitalism produced reification, or projected its own concepts on every object in society, thereby obscuring what that object truly is in itself (5). Adorno argued that this disjuncture between an object and how it is perceived under capitalism is what drives false consciousness: the situation in which the individual in society cannot perceive this disjuncture between how things really are, how they are presented in capitalism, and, crucially, how they could be conceptualised otherwise. On this last point, Adorno proposed an idea of negative dialectics, which would not only point out the so-called 'non-identity' between the object and the concept forced upon it, but would also negate this relation itself by presenting how the object could be conceptualised through a closer, more accurate concept (although he fears that virtually all concepts do some violence to their object) (12). Of course, Adorno's analysis presumes to have the power to decide which consciousness is false and which consciousness is genuine, a confidence that runs through many of the literary interpretations that we will examine in this thesis. Whilst I will go into more detail on Adorno's theory of reification and false consciousness in the first chapter, this entire thesis demonstrates how Adorno conceived literature as offering a specific critical function. Even from Adorno's very early literary criticism, he presents the idea that literature itself can name and resist false consciousness in its ability to express and draw upon this non-identical aspect of object and concept.

As a result, my thesis will be building upon the extensive existing scholarship on Adorno and modernism. This scholarship was established by German-language scholars who were working on Adorno's interest in what he referred to as "*die Moderne*" (*Ästhetische* 176).[2] In German, "*die Moderne*" can encompass various meanings depending on the context – it can mean "modernism", the "modern" or "modernity". Burkhardt Lindner and W. Martin Lüdke's edited collection *Materialien zur ästhetischen Theorie: Theodor W. Adornos Konstruktion der Moderne* [1980], Albrecht Wellmer's article "On the Dialectic of Modernism and Postmodernism" [1984] and Hauke

[2] As Astradur Eysteinsson has noted in *The Concept of Modernism* [2018], on a couple of occasions Adorno used the term "*Modernismus*" to refer to modernism (although this was limited to a few occasions and the meaning was more pejorative in tone) (40). Whilst more recent German scholarship often uses "*Modernismus*" to capture the sense of its English equivalent "modernism", it is still common to find the term "*Moderne*" in contemporary Germanophone criticism.

Brunkhorst's book *Theodor W. Adorno: Dialektik der Moderne* [1990] represent three of the foundational studies that emphasised how *die Moderne* was simultaneously the reified condition that was modernity, as well as a quality, a condition, or even aesthetic artefact that could redeem that very modernity.[3] After Lindner and Lüdke's study helped to establish the interpretation that Adorno's construction of *die Moderne* was inextricably enmeshed with his aesthetic theory, figures such as Wellmer and Brunkhorst suggested that the *Moderne* - or modernism - that would critique the problems of modernity ["*Moderne*"] would itself be "aesthetic" or "cultural" ["*kulturelle Moderne*"] (Wellmer, "On" 341-42; Brunkhorst, *Theodor* 113-15). Whilst many studies have gone on to apply the idea of Adorno's interest in *die Moderne* to a variety of subjects including philosophy, politics and art, the English translation of "*Moderne*" into "modernism" has seen a tradition of Anglophone criticism that focuses on the aesthetic dimension of *die Moderne*.[4] The most important interventions in

[3] Wellmer's piece is a condensed English version of his argument in his book *Zur Dialektik von Moderne und Postmoderne: Vernunftkritik nach Adorno* [1985].

[4] For more German-language scholarship on Adorno and *die Moderne* please see: Viktor Žmegač's chapter "Adorno und die Wiener Moderne der Jahrhundertwende" [1986], Holger Mathias Briel's book *Adorno und Derrida, oder, Wo liegt das ende der Moderne?* [1993], Albrecht Wellmer's chapter "Adorno, die Moderne und das Erhabene" [1995], Peter V. Zima's article "Diskurse der Negativität von Mallarmé und Valéry zu Adorno und Lyotard: Konstruktion und Krise des Subjekts zwischen Moderne und Postmoderne" [1998], Bernd U. Kulawik's article "Wagnerkritik als Kulturkritik der Moderne bei Nietzsche und Adorno" [2000], Juliane Rebentisch's article "Die Liebe zur Kunst und deren Verkennung: Adornos Modernismus" [2003], Friedrich Vosskühler's book *Kunst als Mythos der Moderne* [2004], Johann Dvořák's book *Theodor W. Adorno und die Wiener Moderne: Ästhetische Theorie, Politik und Gesellschaft* [2005], J. Früchtl's article "Der Kampf des Selbst mit sich selbst: Adorno und Heidegger über die Moderne" [2008], David Wachter's chapter "Experimentum modernitatis: Zur Aktualisierung der Nietzsche-Wagner-Beziehung bei Martin Heidegger, Ernst Bloch und Theodor W. Adorno" [2008], Romano Pocai's book *Philosophie, Kunst und Moderne: Überlegungen mit Hegel und Adorno* [2014], and Nicolas Dierks' book *Endlose Erneuerung: Moderne Kultur und Ästhetik mit Wittgenstein und Adorno* [2015]. For other sources on Adorno and modernism, please see: Jean-François Lyotard's article "Adorno as the Devil" [1974], Peter Uwe Hohendahl's article "Autonomy of Art: Looking Back at Adorno's Ästhetische Theorie" [1981], Andreas Huyssen's book *After the Great Divide Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* [1986], Ian McLean's article "Modernism and Marxism, Greenberg and Adorno" [1988], Rainer Rochlitz's article "Language for One, Language for All: Adorno and Modernism" [1989], Peter Osborne's chapter "Adorno and the Metaphysics of Modernism" [1989], Sabine Wilke's article "Adorno and Derrida as Readers of Husserl: Some Reflections on the Historical Context of Modernism and Postmodernism" [1989], Neil Larsen's book *Modernism and Hegemony: A Materialist Critique of Aesthetic Agencies* [1990], Fredric Jameson's book *Late Marxism: Adorno: Or, the Persistence of the Dialectic* [1990], Peter Bürger's article "Adorno's Anti-Avant-Gardism" [1990], Richard Wolin's article "Utopia, Mimesis, and Reconciliation: A Redemptive Critique of Adorno's Aesthetic Theory" [1990], Albrecht Wellmer's book *The Persistence of Modernity: Essays on Aesthetics, Ethics, and Postmodernism* [1991], Peter Bürger's book *The Decline of Modernism* [1992], Lambert Zuidervaart's book *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory: The Redemption of Illusion* [1993], J. M. Bernstein's book *The Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Derrida and Adorno* [1993], Zuidervaart and Thomas Huhn's edited collection *The Semblance of Subjectivity: Essays in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory* [1997], Max Pensky's edited collection *The Actuality of Adorno: Critical Essays on Adorno and the Postmodern* [1997], Albrecht Wellmer's chapter "Adorno, Modernity, and the Sublime" [1997], Hauke Brunkhorst's book *Adorno and Critical Theory* [1999], Alastair Williams' article "Adorno and the Semantics of Modernism" [1999], Stephen Baker's book *The Fiction of Postmodernity* [2000], Mary Caputi's "Unmarked and Unrehearsed: Theodor Adorno and the Performance Art of Cindy Sherman" [2006], Alex Thomson's book

the Anglophone criticism on Adorno and *modernism* include those by Gillian Rose, Eugene Lunn, Andrew Benjamin, Max Paddison, Tyrus Miller, Espen Hammer and Robin Truth Goodman.[5]

In particular, I draw upon a specific cognitive understanding of "modernism" that has been especially prevalent in the Anglophone Adornian scholarship. This interpretation of the term is best captured by what Lambert Zuidervaart refers to as "aesthetic modernism" in *Adorno's Aesthetic*

*Adorno: A Guide for the Perplexed* [2006], Peter V. Zima's chapter "The Subject, the Beautiful and the Sublime: Adorno and Lyotard Between Modernism and Postmodernism" [2007], Sascha Bru's article "A Map of All Possible Paths: Modernism after Marxism" [2007], Ehrhard Bahr's book *Weimar on the Pacific: German Exile Culture in Los Angeles and the Crisis of Modernism* [2007], Gerard Delanty's chapter "T. W. Adorno as a Critical Intellectual in the Public Sphere: Between Marxism and Modernism" [2007], Stephen Ross' edited collection *Modernism and Theory: A Critical Debate* [2009], Andrew McNamara's book *An Apprehensive Aesthetic: The Legacy of Modernist Culture* [2009], David S. Ferris' article "Politics and the Enigma of Art: The Meaning of Modernism for Adorno" [2010], J. M. Bernstein's book *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics* [2010], Aleš Erjavec's chapter "Aesthetics and the Aesthetic Today: After Adorno" [2010], Steve Giles' chapter "Realism after Modernism: Representation and Modernity in Brecht, Lukács and Adorno" [2011], J. M. Bernstein's chapter "Political Modernism: The New Revolution and Civil Disobedience in Arendt and Adorno" [2012], Joel Nickels' book *Poetry of the Possible: Spontaneity, Modernism, and the Multitude* [2012], Neil Levi's book *Modernist Form and the Myth of Jewification* [2013], Jean-Michel Rabaté's *A Handbook of Modernism Studies* [2013], Eric Bulson's chapter "Modernisms High and Low" [2013], Catherine Flynn's chapter "Marxist Modernisms: From Jameson to Benjamin" [2013], Ewa Plonowska Ziarek's chapter "From Parody to the Event; from Affect to Freedom" [2013], Jonathan Loesberg's chapter "Aesthetic Formalism, the Form of Artworks, and Formalist Criticism" [2013], Brian O'Connor's book *Adorno* [2013], Deborah Cook's book *Adorno: Key Concepts* [2014], E. Gordon's article "Wounded Modernism: Adorno on Wagner" [2016], C. D. Blanton's chapter "Modernism and Reification: Lukács, Benjamin, Adorno" [2016], and Ben Ware's book *Modernism, Ethics and the Political Imagination: Living Wrong Life Rightly* [2017].

[5] Gillian Rose's *The Melancholy Science* [1978] is one of the earliest and defining pieces of secondary criticism on Adorno. Rose devotes her book's sixth chapter to an account of Lukács and Adorno's dispute over modernism (*The Melancholy* 109-37). Eugene Lunn's *Marxism and Modernism* [1982], perhaps one of the most important accounts of the Marxist debate on Expressionism written in the twentieth century, with its analysis of Marx's, Lukács', Brecht's, Benjamin's and Adorno's respective theories of modernism. Lunn argues that Adorno's theory defended modern, expressionist art as that which would be most effective at unveiling and negating reification (271-72). Andrew Benjamin's edited collection *The Problems of Modernity: Adorno and Benjamin* [1989] contains chapters that look at Adorno's "philosophical engagement with the problem of modernity", or the tension between postmodernist thought and Adorno's theory of aesthetic modernism (ix). Max Paddison's *Adorno, Modernism and Mass Culture: Essays on Critical Theory and Music* [1996] represents one of the many texts in the area of Adorno and modernist music. Tyrus Miller's book *Modernism and the Frankfurt School* [2014] provides a devoted chapter to Adorno and modernism which argues that Adorno's writing itself "mimetically assum[ed] features" of modernist music, literature and art and "reflect[ed] them back with a critical difference" in order "to disclose their truth without, in turn, imposing an external, abstract concept upon them." (79). As the title might indicate, Espen Hammer's book *Adorno and Modernism* [2015] has proven to be one of the most extensive and in-depth accounts of Adorno and modernism in recent years. Hammer's study intends to map out and understand Adorno's "intellectual response […] to the historical manifestation of high modernism" and the "philosophical concerns animating this response" (12). Roger Foster's book *Adorno and Philosophical Modernism: The Inside of Things* [2016] argues that Adorno's philosophy should be understood as "philosophical modernism", or that which brings "rational discourse to an awareness of its dependence on a moment that, while it cannot be integrated into that discourse, is at the same time the key to a full and non-regressive development of rational thinking" (14, 63) Recently, Robin Truth Goodman's edited collection *Understanding Adorno, Understanding Modernism* [2020] revisits Adorno's thoughts on modernism in the fields of literature, art, music, animal studies, queer theory, educational policy and postcolonial trauma (Truth Goodman 1-4).

*Theory* [1993], or a label for the artworks that Adorno privileged as particularly critical or resistant in capitalist society (38-43).[6] As Zuidervaart elaborates:

> For Adorno, [certain] modernist works have sufficient experiential depth and technical progressiveness to resist the commodification of consciousness and to expose the hidden contradictions of advanced capitalism. Modern literature must be endorsed, with suitable qualifications, because of its critical experience and technique. Works such as Beckett's *Endgame* provide a 'precise, wordless polemic' against a 'nonsensical world.' In this polemic resides the possibility of a fundamentally transformed society. (42).

Although Adorno himself would have used the term *die Moderne*, Anglophone criticism has often used the word "modernist" to conceptualise Adorno's core thesis that certain artworks had a particular cognitive quality that would enable his critique of capitalism's false consciousness. Certainly, some critics do not use the exact term "aesthetic modernism" and instead prefer other formulae; for example, Christoph Menke uses the phrase "aesthetic negativity" in *The Sovereignty of Art: Aesthetic Negativity in Adorno and Derrida* [1998] (3). But no matter what specific label they use, Albrecht Wellmer ("On" 341), Lambert Zuidervaart (*Adorno's* 42), Max Paddison (*Adorno* 49), Hauke Brunkhorst (*Adorno* 67, 114), Shea Coulson (102), Espen Hammer (*Adorno's* vii), Owen Hulatt (*Adorno's* xi), and Robin Truth Goodman (1) have all outlined the *idea* that Adorno turned to certain artistic works to uncover the non-identity between the subject and object and "say the unsayable, the fact that it cannot be said" (*NTL2* 4).[7] My study will invoke and build upon this specific, cognitive understanding of "modernism" in the scholarship by applying it to the literary sphere.

Whilst "aesthetic modernism" is a broad term that covers many different artistic forms that Adorno was interested in, from music to painting, I have made the decision to focus on modernist

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[6] Zuidervaart argues that Adorno was navigating the dialectic between reification and reconciliation, using aesthetic modernism as a tool that would simultaneously "undermine reification without supporting a premature reconciliation." (*Adorno's* 42).

[7] This cognitive sense of Adorno's aesthetic modernism has also been well established in the German criticism (although it has taken a life of its own in Anglophone criticism). For example, Hauke Brunkhorst's article "Die ästhetische Konstruktion der Moderne: Adorno, Gadamer, Luhmann" [1988] outlines the "cognitive" ["*kognitive*"] quality that Adorno locates in "aesthetic modernism" ["*ästhetischen Modernismus*"] in that its aesthetic "negation of the negatives" in society ["*Negation des Negativen*"] opens up new meanings and details what has since become mute (84-85, 88). Note that the English quotations here are my own translations.

*literature.*[8] This is not to suggest that Joyce would have been more important to Adorno than Wagner, but to redress the neglect of Adorno's turn to certain novels, plays and poems for developing his philosophical thought. Although key scholars such as Eugene Lunn, Lambert Zuidervaart, Tyrus Miller and Espen Hammer have noted that Adorno bought into a certain group of modernist writers, the scholarship suffers from an excessively constrained account of Adorno's reading interests.[9]

One of the most common approaches to Adorno's literary thought in the secondary scholarship is the study of the relationship between Adorno and specific writers. This approach often comes in the form of the biographical study of Adorno's interest in certain writers, focusing on his various pieces of literary criticism. Some of the most well-known examples of Adorno's literary interpretations include his essays "Trying to Understand Endgame", "Notes on Kafka" and "Short Commentaries on Proust". In both the English and German scholarship, we have seen studies on Adorno's interpretations of writers including Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Friedrich Schiller, Eduard Mörikes, Honoré de Balzac, Charles Dickens, Henrik Ibsen, Marcel Proust, Guy de Maupassant, Friedrich Hölderlin, Franz Kafka, Bertolt Brecht, Thomas Mann, Samuel Beckett and Stefan Georges.[10] Scholars have also *applied* Adornian theory to certain writers.

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[8] Whilst this interpretation of Adorno as a modernist theorist in his own right has led scholars to pay most attention to Adorno's aesthetic theory as a manifesto for aesthetic modernism, scholars in Adorno Studies have diversified what they mean by Adornian modernism in different disciplines. Just as Espen Hammer has stated, "Accordingly, for Adorno his theory of modernism is not only an aesthetic theory, but also a theory of reason, history, and the history of reason.", the study of Adorno and modernism covers a range of disciplines, from Roger Foster's notion of "philosophical modernism" (*Adorno's* 56) to J. M. Bernstein's idea of "political modernism" ("Political" 58). Some of these studies in question are incredibly critical of the privileged role of the aesthetic in Adorno's theory of modernism – for example, Bernstein argues that Adorno's aesthetic modernism has no place for praxis and lacks the critical power of Arendt's more directly political modernism (57-58). Whilst I will be primarily focusing on aesthetic modernism, it is important to see how these diverse understandings of Adorno's modernism might be complementary; for example, this dissertation would argue that Adorno's interest in modernist art is directly connected to his wider philosophical thought.

[9] The relation between Adorno and modernist literature has been discussed by Lunn in *Marxism and Modernism* (272-74), Zuidervaart in *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory* (39-43), Miller in *Modernism and the Frankfurt School* (78-79), Hammer in *Adorno's Modernism* (141) and Richard Eldridge in "Adorno As A Modernist Writer" (394). Scholars such as Roger Foster have *applied* the thought of Adorno to writers such as Joyce and Woolf in *Adorno and Philosophical Modernism* (44-47).

[10] For some examples of criticism that looks at Adorno's actual engagement with certain writers, please see: Ulrich Schulz-Buschhaus' chapter "Zola, Adorno und die Geschichte der nichtkanonisierten Literatur" [1976], Hans-Martin Möller's book *Adorno, Proust, Beckett: Zur Aktualisierung einer alternden Theorie* [1981], Martin Lüdke's book *Anmerkungen zu einer* "*Logik des Zerfalls*"*: Adorno* - Beckett [1981], Petra Cornelia Schmidt-Betsch's PhD thesis *Idee versus Ideologie die Lukács-Adorno-Kontroverse und die Freiheit des Menschen in Heinrich Bölls littérature engagée: zur Frage nach dem poetischen Realismus in der Moderne* [1993], Simon Critchley's book *Very Little … Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy and Literature* [1997], Stanley Corngold's article "Adorno's Notes on Kafka: A Critical Reconstruction" [2002], Shun-ye Rhi's book *Aporie des Schönen: Eine Studie über Lessing, Schiller, Kant und Hegel, in der mit Adorno über die Abstraktwerdung der*

For instance, Adorno's ideas have been applied to the works of William Wordsworth, Percy Shelley, Emily Dickinson, Thomas Hardy, Virginia Woolf, Wallace Stevens, Kazuo Ishiguro, Michael Palmer and Art Spiegelman to name a few.[11] It should be noted that such studies do not always cover writers that Adorno would have read or even been aware of.[12] But the application of Adorno's theory to specific literary case studies (in its attempt to draw out correspondences between the theorist and a given writer) has often fruitfully speculated how certain books may be working within (or even proving) Adorno's theoretical framework. My study will be focusing on authors that Adorno engaged with rather than applying his philosophy to those he did not. Nevertheless, whilst I am interested in what Adorno *took* from the writers he actually read or wrote about, I will also be examining how Adorno inevitably applied his thought to these literary texts.

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*klassischen Literatur und die Entwicklung philosophischer Ästhetik in Deutschland reflekiert wird* [2002], Alexander Honold's chapter "Odysseus in korrigierter Haltung Entstellungen des Mythos bei Kafka, Brecht, Benjamin und Adorno/Horkheimer" [2005], M. J. Jandl's chapter "Verfremdung als literarische Strategie: Beckett und Kafka interpretiert von Anders und Adorno" [2006], Tony Phelan's book *Reading Heinrich Heine* [2007], Roy Sellars' article "'Wallowing in the Rubbish of Departed Ignorance': Poetic knowledge in Peacock, Wordsworth and Adorno" [2007], Robert Savage's book *Hölderlin After the Catastrophe: Heidegger, Adorno, Brecht* [2008], Peter Uwe Hohendahl's chapter "Adorno als Leser Heines" in his book *Heinrich Heine: Europäischer Schriftsteller und Intellektueller* [2008], David Farrell Krell's chapter "Twelve Anacoluthic Theses on Adorno's 'Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry'" [2010], Patricia Anne Simpson's chapter "Gretchen's Ghosts: Goethe, Adorno, and the Literature of Refuge" [2013], Damien Marwood's article "Sur l'Eau, or How to Read Adorno: Guy de Maupassant and the Negative Dialectic of Utopia" [2016], Justin N. Kaushall's article "The Echoic Imagination: Beckett and Adorno on Aesthetic Experience" [2016] and Bernhard Böschenstein's chapter "Überlegungen zu Adornos Interpretationen Stefan Georges, Eduard Mörikes, Friedrich Hölderlins in den Noten zur Literatur" [2019]. Please note that due to the fact that there are so many studies of this kind, I cannot list them all here. Please refer to the 2019 *Adorno Handbuch*'s section on "Literatur und Sprache" for a detailed list of criticism about Adorno's engagement with specific writers (Richard Klein et al. 639-45).

[11] For examples of studies that apply Adorno's theory to literature, see: Neil Lazarus' article "Modernism and Modernity: T. W. Adorno and Contemporary White South African Literature" [1986], Robert Eaglestone's article "Madness or Modernity?: The Holocaust in Two Anglo-American Comics" [2002], Andreas Huyssen's chapter "Of Mice and Mimesis: Reading Spiegelman with Adorno" [2003], Martin Ryle and Kate Soper's chapter "Adorno's Critical Presence: Cultural Theory and Literary Value" [2006], David Miller's chapter "The Echo of the Poetic: Hardy and Adorno" in his book *With Poetry and Philosophy* [2007], Amy Parker Dixon's thesis *Towards a Poetics of Criticism: Adornoian Negativity and the Experiential in the Essays and Musical Marginalia of Virginia Woolf* [2010], Ewa Płonowska Ziarek's book *Feminist Aesthetics and the Politics of Modernism* [2012], Patrick Pritchett's article "How to Write Poetry after Auschwitz: The Burnt Book of Michael Palmer" [2014], Colleen Shu-Ching Wu's article "Overcoming Oneself as Subject in Dickinson's Poetry: Adorno and Heidegger" [2015], Hampus Östh Gustafsson's chapter "Auschwitz, Adorno and the Ambivalence of Representation: The Holocaust as a Point of Reference in Contemporary Literature" [2015], and Rebecca Tamas' thesis *Radically Different: Thinking the Nonhuman in Wallace Stevens and Theodor Adorno, and, Witch (Poetry Collection)* [2017] just to name a few.

[12] Although, of course, Adorno was sometimes aware of the writers in these studies. For example, Adorno owned a copy of Keats' poetry and Robert Kaufman's article "Negatively Capable Dialectics: Keats, Vendler, Adorno, and the Theory of the Avant-Garde" [2001] looks at the correspondences between the two (356).

In addition to the study of Adorno and specific writers, in the Anglophone criticism a broader conceptualisation of the relationship between Adorno and literature has become a rich area of study. Since the 1970s, Adorno's interest in literature has been the subject of the work of several dissertation students, Fredric Jameson, Susan Buck-Morss, Roy Pascal, Lambert Zuidervaart, Rolf Wiggershaus, Peter Uwe Hohendahl, James Harding, Andrew Bowie, William D. Melaney, Simon Jarvis, Shierry Weber Nicholsen, Steve Evans, Gerhard Richter, Samuel Weber, Katja Garloff, Robert Kaufman, Vivian Liska, Lisa Yun Lee and Bhesham R. Sharma.[13] But it is especially within the last 15 years that Anglophone scholars have paid greater attention to the significance of Adorno's engagement with his literature *for his wider theory*.[14] Some commentators have inadvertently downplayed the role of

[13] Michael Taylor Jones' thesis *Constellations of Modernity: The Literary Essays of Theodor W. Adorno* [1978], Karla Lydia Schultz's thesis *The Duplicity of Mimesis: Theodor W. Adorno's Contribution to Literary Theory* [1985] and Thomas James Davies' thesis *Negativity and Mediation in Adorno's Literary Aesthetic* [1986] are striking for providing such extended studies of the literary dimension of Adornian thought at such an early point of Anglophone Adorno Studies. However, the fact that these pieces are less accessible than the more well-known monographs and books may explain why there has been a more sustained interest in Adorno and literature in the last two decades. Meanwhile, Fredric Jameson's text *Marxism and Form: 20th-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* [1971] is one of the earliest significant English-language works that explicitly looks at Adorno's theory of literature. Other works that followed Jameson's include: Susan Buck-Morss' *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt Institute* [1977], Roy Pascal's chapter "The Magic Mountain and Adorno's Critique of the Traditional Novel" [1977], Lambert Zuidervaart's article "Methodological Shadowboxing in Marxist Aesthetics: Lukács and Adorno" [1988], John Orr's book *Tragic Realism and Modern Society: The Passionate Political in the Modern Novel* [1989], Peter Uwe Hohendahl's chapter "Experience and Reflection: Theodor W. Adorno's Literary Criticism" [1992], Rolf Wiggershaus' book *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories, and Political Significance* [1994], Peter Uwe Hohendahl's chapter "Interpretation as Critique: The Path to Literature" in his book *Prismatic Thought* [1995], James Harding's book *Adorno and "A Writing of the Ruins": Essays on Modern Aesthetics and Anglo-American Literature and Culture* [1997], Andrew Bowie's book *From Romanticism to Critical Theory: The Philosophy of German Literary Theory* [1997], William D. Melaney's article "Art as a Form of Negative Dialectics: 'Theory' in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory" [1997], Simon Jarvis' book *Adorno: A Critical Introduction* [1998], Shierry Weber Nicholsen's book *Exact Imagination, Late Work: On Adorno's Aesthetics* [1999], Steve Evans' article "'A World Unsuspected': The Dynamics of Literary Change in Hegel, Bourdieu, and Adorno" [2001], Gerhard Richter's special issue of *Monatshefte* entitled *Rereading Adorno* [2002], Samuel Weber's chapter "'As Though the End of the World Had Come and Gone' or 'Allemal ist nicht immergleich': Critical Theory and the Task of Reading" [2002], Katja Garloff's article "Essay, Exile, Efficacy: Adorno's Literary Criticism" [2002], Robert Kaufman's chapter "Adorno's Social Lyric, and Literary Criticism Today: Poetics, Aesthetics, Modernity" [2004], Vivian Liska's chapter "Two Sirens Singing: Literature as Contestation in Blanchot and Adorno" [2004], Lisa Yun Lee's book *Dialectics of the Body: Corporeality in the Philosophy of Theodor Adorno* [2005] and Bhesham R. Sharma's *The Death of Art* [2006].

[14] This growth in the Anglophone scholarship in the last fifteen years follows the extensive work being done in the German criticism. For the last five decades, German scholars have already been discussing the significance of Adorno's literary thought; for example, there are various important studies such as Manfred Jablinski's book *Theodor W. Adorno: "Kritische Theorie" als Literatur- und Kunstkritik* [1976], Heinz Ludwig Arnold's publication *Text + Kritik: Theodor W. Adorno* [1983], Manfred Jurgensen's chapter "Adornos Literaturkonzept" [1986], Andrei Corbea-Hoisie's chapter "Der Literatur-Kritiker als Literaturkritiker: Bemerkungen zu dem (doch) resignierten Adorno" [1990], Gerhard Kaiser's article "Philosophie als Literaturkritik Zum 100: Geburtstag von Theodor W. Adorno" [2003] and Peter Uwe Hohendahl's chapter "Der Literaturkritiker Adorno im Kontext der Literaturkritik der Nachkriegszeit" [2011]. Although the German scholarship has been quicker than the Anglophone scholarship to relate the significance of Adorno's literary criticism to his wider

literature to Adorno's critical theory project as a whole, often presenting Adorno's literary theory as an isolated field of study that is distinct from, say, his philosophical thinking.[15] In response, David Cunningham and Nigel Mapp's seminal essay collection *Adorno and Literature* [2006] was an important intervention in the field because it suggested that academics need to see Adorno's interest in literature as a central rather than marginal aspect of his philosophical thought (1). Cunningham and

philosophy, the German criticism has seen similar calls for a re-evaluation of the link between Adorno and Literature in more recent years. In 2010, Heinrich Pacher lamented in his book *Die Spontaneität der Literatur: Studien zur Literaturtheorie Adornos* that Literary Studies had *still* not adequately recognised the contribution of Adorno's literary theory and aesthetic theory (9-42). The last decade has seen the publication of careful, extensive monographs about the relation between Adorno's theory and the writers that he wrote about, from Marc Kleine's book *Ob es überhaupt noch möglich ist: Literatur nach Auschwitz in Adornos ästhetischer Theorie* [2011] to Pola Groß's recently published book *Adornos Lächeln: Das "Glück am Ästhetischen" in seinen literatur- und kulturtheoretischen Essays* [2020]. For other sources on Adorno and literature in German, see: Leo Kofler's work *Zur Theorie der modernen Literatur der Avantgardismus in soziologischer Sicht* [1962], Norbert W. Bolz's thesis *Geschichtsphilosophie des Ästhetischen: Hermeneutische Rekonstruktion der "Noten zur Literatur" Th. W. Adornos* [1976], Dolf Oehler's article "Charisma des Nicht-Identischen: Ohnmacht des Aparten - Adorno und Benjamin als Literaturkritiker: am Beispiel Proust" [1977], W. Martin Lüdke's article "Zu reden wäre von der Echternacher Springprozession, Adorno und der Literatur nach Auschwitz" [1979], Peter Bürger's book *Zur Dichotomisierung von hoher und niederer Literatur* [1982], Ortwin Thal's book *Realismus und Fiktion literatur- und filmtheoretische Beiträge von Adorno, Lukács, Kracauer und Bazin* [1985], Byeong-Ho Mun's work *Intentionslose Parteinahme: Zum Verhältnis der Kunst und Literatur zur Gesellschaft im Bann der Naturbeherrschung und Rationalisierung bei Theodor W. Adorno* [1992], Christine Eichel's chapter "Zwischen der Lüge des Eindeutigen und der Wahrheit des Vieldeutigen: Adornos Theorie einer musikalischen Sprachlichkeit der Literatur" in her book *Vom Ermatten der Avantgarde zur Vernetzung der Künste* [1993], Dieter Lamping's book *Literatur und Theorie: über poetologische Probleme der Moderne* [1996], Sigrid Weigel's article "'Kein philosophisches Staunen' — 'Schreiben im Staunen' Zum Verhältnis von Philosophie und Literatur nach 1945: Benjamin, Adorno, Bachmann" [1996], J. Soentgen's chapter "Adornos Lachen, Adornos Tränen: Parodien in Philosophie und Literatur" [2002], Luca Crescenzi's chapter "Unverständlichkeit und Hermetik: Zu Adornos Noten zur Literatur" [2004], Robert Weninger's book *Streitbare Literaten: Kontroversen und Eklats in der deutschen Literatur von Adorno bis Walser* [2004], Jan Philipp Reemtsma's chapter "Der Traum von der Ich-Ferne: Adornos literarische Aufsätze" [2005], Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler's chapter "Gegen den Strich: Adorno als Leser" [2005], Rüdiger Zill's chapter "'Sagen, was sich eigentlich nicht sagen lässt': Adorno, Blumenberg und andere Leser Wittgensteins" [2008], Bert Pütz's book *Literarische Kanonbildung – unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Schriften Adornos* [2009], Sven Kramer's chapter "Adornos Begriff der Deutung und die Stellung der Hermeneutik in der kritischen Literaturwissenschaft" [2009], Filippo Smerilli's chapter "Theodor W. Adorno (1903–1969)" [2010], Anja Nowak's book *Elemente einer Ästhetik des Theatralen in Adornos Ästhetischer Theorie* [2012], Marc Kleine's article "Adornos Schriften zu Literatur und Ästhetik: Neue literaturwissenschaftliche Studien" [2013], Philipp von Wussow's chapter "Adorno über literarische Erkenntnis" [2013], Rolf Wiggershaus' chapter "Zarte Empirie und erfahrendes Denken: Kracauer, Benjamin und Adorno als literarischphilosophische Zeitdiagnostiker" [2014], Hendrikje Schauer's chapter "Adorno Als Ästhetiker Des Widerstands?" [2018] and Michael Dallapiazza's book *Ideologiekritik und Wirkungsgeschichte: Ausgewählte Essays* [2020].

[15] See, for example, Lisa Yun Lee's comment in *Dialectics of the Body* [2005] that: "[Adorno] did not even venture into literary criticism until late in his intellectual life and the majority of his reflections on literature were not published until 1965 in the four-volume series *Notes to Literature*." (76). This is one of various accounts that conceived of Adorno's 'literary theory' as a largely separate endeavour from his other types of work – say, his more 'philosophical' writings. This characterisation misses the fact that Adorno invoked literature throughout his life's work.

Mapp's more sophisticated study of the role of literature in Adorno's theory has been followed by a proliferation of major studies in Adorno and literature in recent years.[16]

However, these scholars tend to focus more on how Adorno draws upon the critical quality of *European* modernist writing. Marcel Proust, Samuel Beckett, Franz Kafka, Paul Celan and Thomas Mann are among the most common writers featured in the criticism on Adorno and literature.[17] Whilst it is understandable that, for instance, the German scholarship would be more focused on Adorno's interest in Germanophone writing, it is surprising that even in the Anglophone criticism there remains a tendency to study the importance of single Anglophone writers to Adorno without offering a more extensive and explicit study of the fact that Adorno championed some of the most famous writers in the English literary canon. According to Peter Uwe Hohendahl: "Excursions into English literature are rare (Dickens, Beckett), and there is no indication that he was ever interested in American literature, even though he lived in the United States for more than a decade." (*Prismatic* 81). Even though Hohendahl's study predates the recent growth of studies on Adorno and literature, Hohendahl's downplaying of Adorno's interest in English literature or the Anglophone canon has still not been

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[16] These new studies include Corey McCall and Nathan Ross' edited collection *Benjamin, Adorno, and the Experience of Literature* [2018], Iain Macdonald's chapter "Adorno and Literature" [2018], Josh Robinson's book *Adorno's Poetics of Form* [2018], Henry W. Pickford's chapter "Adorno and Literary Criticism" [2020], Mario Farina's book *Adorno's Aesthetics as a Literary Theory of Art* [2020], Eleni Philippou's book *Speaking Politically: Adorno and Postcolonial Fiction* [2021] and Stephen Ross' edited collection *Modernism, Theory, and Responsible Reading: A Critical Conversation* [2021]. For other works on Adorno and literature that have come out since Cunningham and Mapp's seminal *Adorno and Literature,* please see: Ulrich Plass' book *Language and History in Theodor W. Adorno's Notes to Literature* [2007], James Schmidt's book *Theodor Adorno* [2007], Ross Wilson's book *Theodor Adorno* [2007], Arne Melberg's book *Aesthetics of Prose* [2008], Steven Helmling's book *Adorno's Poetics of Critique* [2009], Fred Rush's chapter "Literature and Politics" [2009], Antonin Wiser's article "The Experience of Poetry: On the Utopia of Literature in Adorno" [2010], Gerhard Richter's edited collection *Language Without Soil: Adorno and Late Philosophical Modernity* [2010], Peter Uwe Hohendahl's chapter "The Theory of the Novel and the Concept of Realism in Lukács and Adorno" [2011], Geoff Boucher's book *Adorno Reframed: Interpreting Key Thinkers for the Arts* [2012], Peter Uwe Hohendahl's book *The Fleeting Promise of Art: Adorno's Aesthetic Theory Revisited* [2013], Will Daddario and Karoline Gritzner's edited collection *Adorno and Performance* [2014], Karoline Gritzner's book *Adorno and Modern Theatre: The Drama of the Damaged Self in Bond, Rudkin, Barker and Kane* [2015], Ben Hutchinson's chapter "'Lateness as 'a European Language': Theodor W. Adorno and Late Style" in his book *Lateness and Modern European Literature* [2016], William S. Allen's book *Aesthetics of Negativity: Blanchot, Adorno, and Autonomy* [2016], Luciana Dadico's article "Literary Reading, Experience and Education: Reflections From Adorno's Critique" [2017], John C. Welchman's article "Names, Écriture and Enigma: Adorno on Art as Writing" [2017], Thijs Lijster's book *Benjamin and Adorno on Art and Art Criticism: Critique of Art* [2017], Jeffrey T. Nealon's chapter "The Frankfurt School and Its Successors" [2018], Gerhard Richter's book *Thinking with Adorno: The Uncoercive Gaze* [2019] and Richard Eldridge's chapter "Adorno As A Modernist Writer" [2020].

[17] The dominance of these writers in the scholarship becomes apparent when you survey the "Literatur und Sprache" section of the International Adorno Bibliography in the *Adorno-Handbuch* (Richard Klein et al. 639-45).

fully corrected. Figures such as Neil Lazarus, Ryle and Soper, and Aleš Erjavec have maintained that Adorno favoured a largely European modernist literary canon (Lazarus 134; Ryle and Soper 33; Erjavec 198). This is not to say that the Anglophone literature that Adorno was invested in should not be understood as European itself; a writer such as Beckett – who wrote in English and French - clearly blurs the lines between the two. Indeed, Adorno read many Anglophone works in German or French translation. His interest in English literature is also consistent with his preference for Western European literature, languages and culture. But it is worth considering how his interest in Anglophone literature compares with his well-known investment in a distinctly Continental European canon.

If we turn to Adorno's literary criticism, one gets the sense that Adorno was especially comfortable with analysing German and French literature. For example, in "Heine the Wound", Adorno contextualises Heine within a German historical-cultural context with an ease that is not quite matched in his reading of Anglophone writers. Similarly, in "Valéry's Deviations", there is significantly more close reading of extracts from the French writer's works than some of his interpretations of Anglophone writers – most notably, his reading of Joyce. But this is not to say that Adorno did not offer informed analyses of Anglophone writers. For example, we will see how Adorno is aware of broad currents of British literary history, allowing him to read Joyce through Dickens, or Beckett through Shakespeare. Meanwhile, we will also see how his interpretations of Dickens and Huxley directly quote and discuss passages from *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Brave New World* respectively. Despite the often flimsy nature of Adorno's readings of Anglophone literature, the texts were crucially important to him as responses to capitalism. Considering the fact that Britain underwent industrialisation before Germany, German intellectuals often drew upon English writers' depictions of capitalism for their critiques – see, for example, Marx's praise of English industrial writers from Dickens to Gaskell in "The English Middle Class" (105). As one of the most powerful writers on industrial capitalism, it is no wonder that Dickens roused Adorno's interest in his early literary theory. Dickens and Huxley represent to Adorno two bookends of writers who offered key responses to different stages of capitalism in the Anglophone world, from industrial capitalism in England to consumer capitalism in America. In addition, three of these writers spent significant time in exile from their home countries: Joyce and Beckett lived away from Ireland, and Huxley lived

away from England. Whilst there is no documentary evidence of Adorno conceptualising these three writers together as exiles, it is necessarily speculative to consider how Adorno's own exile in Anglophone countries provoked him to turn to Anglophone writers to find the words to reflect upon his experience of alienation (and to reflect on his wish to represent that alienation) that runs through his literary theory and philosophy.

Furthermore, it is precisely the dialectically invested yet creative quality of Adorno's reading of Anglophone literature that is especially compelling. Just as Adorno turns to Anglophone writers to find certain words or motifs to develop his theory, he often reads their work superficially, at a remove, or even unfaithfully. As we will discover, his reading of Dickens is rather naïve, his reading of Joyce does not deal with his novels at hand, his reading of Beckett displeased the playwright and his reading of Huxley actively disagreed with the author's own position on his work. Whilst it is not unusual for a critic to disagree with a writer on the meaning of the writer's own work, the extreme points of Adorno's criticism use Anglophone literature as grist for his own ideas. To some degree, this particular approach has the effect of enacting a kind of epistemic violence that he would berate in other contexts: here, texts are not necessarily allowed to speak for themselves but are co-opted into a pre-ordained theory. And yet, Adorno's theory offers the tools for charting both the strengths and drawbacks of his own readings.

Adorno's writings and library give a greater sense of his interest in Anglophone literature than has been acknowledged in the existing scholarship. His writings contain references to – or even extensive discussions of – the works of William Shakespeare (*NTL1* 115), Henry Fielding (*NTL1* 32), Walter Scott (*NTL1* 134), Edgar Allan Poe (*AT* 20), Charles Dickens (*NTL1* 228), Mark Twain (*Der Schatz* 1-136), Margaret Harkness (*NTL1* 131), Oscar Wilde (*MM* 169), Jack London (*NTL2* 83), T.S. Eliot (*NTL1* 227), Thomas Wolfe (*NTL1* 223), Evelyn Waugh (*MM* 191), Tennessee Williams (*NTL1* 266), Ezra Pound (*NTL2* 108), James Joyce (*NTL1* 31), Samuel Beckett (*NTL1* 4) and Aldous Huxley (*NTL1* 157).[18] Adorno's existing library at the Frankfurt Adorno Archive contains texts by Thomas De Quincey, Henry Fielding, William Makepeace Thackeray, Charles Dickens, Arthur Conan Doyle,

[18] Please note that these references are not exhaustive but aim to show examples of where these writers can be found in Adorno's published works.

Herman Melville, James F. Cooper, Samuel Butler, Henry James, Oscar Wilde, Edgar Allan Poe, Evelyn Waugh, Henry Green, Norman Douglas, F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, Sherwood Anderson, Joseph Conrad, T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Richard Hughes, H.P. Lovecraft, James Baldwin, Carson McCullers, Aldous Huxley, Vladimir Nabokov, Truman Capote, Samuel Beckett and Donald Barthelme. Additionally, the library collection features books containing poetry by Lord Byron, John Keats, Percy Shelley, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Blake, Christina Georgina Rossetti, Robert Browning, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Rudyard Kipling, Walt Whitman, Lewis Carroll, W. B. Yeats, Paul Engle, Martin S. Allwood, Francis Golffing, Edouard Roditi and Edna Saint Vincent Millay. The library also holds works by the playwrights William Shakespeare, George Bernard Shaw, Eugene O'Neill, Thornton Wilder, John Arden, Shelagh Delaney, John Mortimer, Harold Pinter, Edward Bond, and Archibald MacLeish. Finally, Adorno owned secondary criticism on the field of English Literature by Emile Legouis, Ian Watt, Helmut Viebrock, Leo Löwenthal and Ezra Pound.[19]

Adorno's interaction with Anglophone literature was also influenced by a larger, German engagement with English literature. At the time of Adorno's birth in 1903, German translators and publishers had already cultivated German readers' interest in Shakespeare, John Milton, Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope, Henry Fielding, Laurence Sterne, Oliver Goldsmith, Walter Scott, Percy Shelley, Lord Byron and Dickens as well as the American writers Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Poe and Whitman.[20] During the course of his lifetime, Adorno worked with publishers that not only maintained the relevance of English literature to the German reading public, but also helped to promote some of the most famous Anglophone twentieth-century, *modernist* writers. For instance, Adorno was friends with the directors of Suhrkamp Verlag, the publishing house that published many of his own works during his life and after his death (including, most notably, his collected works). Under the direction of its founder Peter Suhrkamp and his successor Siegfried Unseld, Suhrkamp

[19] At Oxford, Adorno was friends with Maurice Bowra, the famous British literary critic and later Vice Chancellor of the University of Oxford.

[20] See, for example, Lawrence Marsden Price's *The Reception of English Literature in Germany* [1932] for an account of the reception of these writers - with the exception of Shelley. A description of Shelley's German reception can be found in Susanne Schmid's book *Shelley's German Afterlives: 1814-2000* [2007].

Verlag published German translations of works by T.S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway, Ezra Pound and Samuel Beckett and helped to establish their reputations in Germanic countries. Adorno also engaged with German intellectuals who wrote literary criticism of Anglophone literature – some of which are featured in his library. For instance, he was friends with Helmut Viebrock, a scholar who wrote on T.S. Eliot, translated Woolf and became Professor of English Literature at the University of Frankfurt. If we compare these popular writers with the ones mentioned in Adorno's writings and library, we can see that the popularity of certain Anglophone writers in Germany helped to shape the literature that Adorno engaged with just as much as his experiences in the Anglophone world.[21]

This thesis will therefore redress this relative neglect in the scholarship of the central constitutive role that Anglophone modernist literature had in Adorno's critical theory throughout his life. Of course, Adorno's engagement with Anglophone writers has not gone entirely unnoticed. This study will build upon the few book-length studies on Adorno and Anglophone literature, from James Harding's book *Adorno and "A Writing of the Ruins": Essays on Modern Aesthetics and Anglo-American Literature and Culture* [1997] (which applies Adornian thought to an Anglo-American canon that includes Beckett, Eliot, Ellison and Amiri Baraka), to Charles Blaine Sumner's PhD thesis *The Aesthetics of Failure in Anglo-American Modernist Literature* [2007] (which uses Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* as a "touchstone" with which to interpret the modernist Anglo-American writers Eliot, Hemingway, Lewis and Woolf) (Harding 3; Sumner 42). However, as we can see, these studies *apply* Adornian theory to Anglophone literature rather than examining Adorno's actual engagement with these writers. Therefore, I will focus instead on how Adorno read and interpreted Anglophone writers as part of his critical theory.

I argue that Adorno drew upon Anglophone modernist literature as a cognitive tool that may enable us to resist false consciousness, thereby developing several distinct yet similar types of *reading* through these literatures in his critical theory to point out the non-identity between the concept and the

[21] Of course, it is worth bearing in mind that these represent some of the most popular writers in English-speaking countries at the same time. However, some texts enjoyed a more delayed engagement in Germany and other Germanophone countries due to the fact that the works were not always immediately translated into German.

object. I will show how Adorno explored how literature could represent the difference between the concept and object in four distinct ways. In the first chapter, I note how he investigates the non-identity between the object and concept of capitalist society; in the second chapter, I analyse how he outlines the object and concept of the violence of the Second World War; in the third chapter, I examine how he navigates the object and concept of therapy; and in the fourth chapter, I look at how he interrogates the object and concept of pleasure. Accordingly, I will examine four case studies of writers that Adorno is both influenced by and that he also interprets in the light of his own philosophical theory: Charles Dickens, James Joyce, Samuel Beckett and Aldous Huxley. As we shall see, the non-identity between concept and object is also a feature of Adorno's own criticism because it often does some violence to the texts and writers he enlists. In each chapter, I will argue how Adorno locates specific critical qualities in a particular Anglophone writer that are in line with his interest in aesthetic modernism. My chapters will detail how Adorno offers an allegorical reading of Dickens' novels, commits a very indirect reading of Joyce's novels, develops a therapeutic reading of Beckett's works, and reads Huxley's characters as apostles for pleasure, all as ways of practising a non-identity thinking *via* the literary form.

My study will draw upon published and archival works by Adorno, texts by Dickens, Joyce, Beckett and Huxley, and relevant secondary criticism. The chapters of the thesis are broadly chronological, dealing with authors roughly in the order that their works were published and the order that Adorno wrote about them.

My first chapter "Adorno and Dickens: Reading Allegorically" sets up my thesis by outlining Adorno's reading of Charles Dickens' *The Old Curiosity Shop* as an early example of Adorno's theory that literature might oppose false consciousness. Whilst Adorno's early piece of literary criticism on Dickens has been picked up by scholars in Dickens and Victorian Studies, his essay has the reputation of being an exception. Adorno's own reputation for favouring *modernist* literature means that scholars assume that he would not be sympathetic to Dickensian realism. By examining Adorno's "On Dickens' The Old Curiosity Shop: A Lecture", I argue that Adorno draws upon *The Old Curiosity Shop* to propose a specific theory of allegory as a means of resistance to reification under capitalism. First, I outline how Adorno understood reification and how he privileges certain literature

as a tool that would both diagnose and oppose it. Second, I contextualise Adorno's interest in Dickens within his famous dispute with Lukács and reveal that, contrary to the idea that Adorno was hostile to Dickens' alleged high realism, Adorno conceived him to be an Anglophone modernist writer. Third, I turn to Adorno's lecture to introduce his allegorical reading of Dickens' text which holds that the novel's critical quality is found in its split between an image and its meaning. Next, I turn to Adorno's contention that Little Nell (and her death) could be an allegory that provides an escape from capitalism. Finally, I note how Adorno's lecture takes a diversion and argues the novel's most effective allegory are the old coins given to Nell, causing Adorno to argue that the text is itself a dead object that provokes interpretation in its very refusal to provide meaning. This chapter challenges the too often dualistic conception of realism as something that is opposed to modernism by demonstrating that Adorno saw Dickens as an ostensibly modernist writer.

My second chapter "Adorno and Joyce: Reading Indirectly" expands upon what it means for Adorno to 'read' literature by outlining the actual shape of his reading of Joyce. Although Adorno's defence of Joyce in the Expressionist Debate is well known, critics have not yet fully outlined the actual nature of Adorno's engagement with Joyce's works. Adorno's interest in Joyce rests on a contradiction: whilst Adorno declares Joyce to be one of the most important writers, we have very little evidence of whether he actually read Joyce's novels – for instance, he does not offer direct textual readings of them. Consequently, this chapter holds that Adorno's approach to 'reading' Joyce should be understood more expansively. By analysing Adorno's published and unpublished comments on Joyce's *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake,* I argue that Adorno should be understood as giving a highly questionable reading of Joyce's works based on secondary criticism and hearsay. First, I sketch how Adorno's reading of *Ulysses* as an autonomous, modernist text was made through the discussion of the book's interior monologue and language in the Expressionist Debate. Second, I move on to and set up Adorno's lesser-known secondary reading of *Finnegans Wake* by exploring his interest in a Joycean adaptation - Hans G. Helms' musical poem *Fa:m' Ahniesgwow.* Finally, I discuss how Adorno takes his unfaithful reading of the *Wake* even further than *Ulysses* by arguing that Helms' text realises the modernist, critical spirit of Joyce's work by going beyond its institutionalised techniques.

This chapter intends to show that the apparent lack of evidence of Adorno's direct engagement with Joyce's texts actually reflects the indirect way that the theorist read the writer.

My third chapter "Adorno and Beckett: A Therapeutic Reading" discloses the mechanics of Adorno's interest in the cognitive potential of literature by showing how he read Beckett's texts as works that had a special therapeutic quality. Adorno's essay on Beckett's *Endgame* has been so definitive in both Adorno and Beckett Studies that it seems difficult to expand further upon his engagement with the author. However, the existing scholarship has neglected a key Anglophone context behind Adorno's reading of Beckett's work: how he draws upon Beckettian texts pushes against what he saw as an uncritical, American form of therapy. By examining Adorno's analysis of *The Unnamable* and *Endgame,* I argue that Adorno reads into Beckett's texts a self-consciousness of the failure of contemporary therapy to deal with the psychological and mental wounds of war. In turn, he holds that this self-consciousness gives them a critical therapeutic quality that can depict and perhaps even negate the false consciousness peddled by therapy and society at large. I follow the progression of Adorno's argument through three readings. In the first reading, I establish how Adorno offers a psychoanalytic reading of Beckett's texts to advance the idea that they have a therapeutic quality that could represent the physical damage and false consciousness perpetuated by the Second World War. In the second reading, I convey how Adorno problematises the therapeutic potential of Beckett's work in his scepticism of psychoanalytic interpretations of literature, contending that his textual bodies do not provide a cure for the war's annihilation of bodies and proliferation of false consciousness. In my final reading, I mark out how Adorno concludes that it is Beckett's texts' very failure to be therapeutic that constitutes their critical and potentially redemptive quality. He intimates that *The Unnamable* and *Endgame*'s self-consciousness about the failure of therapy in contemporary society allows the reader to think about how the war's traumas could genuinely be represented and worked upon by a genuine therapy in pursuit of a better society. Through this chapter, I hope to disclose the motivation behind *why* Adorno drew upon Beckett for his theory by showing a crucial Anglophone context (i.e. Adorno's attitude to the Americanisation of European psychoanalysis) that underlines his comments on these two texts.

My fourth chapter "Adorno and Huxley: Reading for Pleasure" demonstrates that Adorno also considered certain pieces of genre fiction to be modernist literature. Whilst Adorno is aware that Huxley himself does not present his famous novel as a celebratory vision of pleasure (but much the opposite), Adorno maintains that elements of the work itself offer a defence of pleasure as a principle in an otherwise unpleasurable society. Scholars have recognised that Adorno and Huxley share strikingly similar attitudes to mass culture as something that disrupts one's capacity to experience pleasure and, in turn, hampers the rational, thinking individual through a form of distraction. However, whilst scholars have picked up on the themes of pleasure and individualism in Adorno's reading of Huxley's *Brave New World,* they have missed how Adorno's turn to a piece of genre fiction complicates the idea that Adorno wanted to recuperate a cultivated individualism through high modernism alone. By examining Adorno's essay on Huxley's *Brave New World,* I argue that he shapes Huxley's text into a tool for countering the culture industry's false consciousness by defending a polyamorous, self-effacing sexual pleasure that resists instrumental reason. First, I point out the similarities of Huxley's and Adorno's respective critiques of mass culture as an unpleasurable, distracting set of practices that liquidates the individual human subject. Second, I examine how Adorno flirts with Huxley's concept of individualism (as exemplified by his individualistic characters), speculating how it might resist the degradation of pleasure under capitalism. Next, I unpack how Adorno ultimately finds Huxley's individualism to be an inadequate approach to the problem of pleasure's debasement in society. In the final section, I end on Adorno's surprising interest in the unfettered, *collective* pleasure evoked by the character of Lenina as a way of recuperating pleasure in a capitalist society that otherwise only provides false fulfilment. I aim to show how Adorno's turn to Lenina offers a new way of understanding Adorno's ambivalent attitude towards individualism, demonstrating how he toyed with the idea of self-annihilation through pleasure as a dialectical way of recuperating critical thought.

In addition to the contributions of each individual chapter, this thesis more generally challenges a dominant view that Adorno was largely dismissive of Anglophone society and culture.[22]

[22] My approach here especially builds upon the excellent work made by David Jenemann in *Adorno in America* [2007], a book which sought to point out Adorno's positive engagements with American culture;

I establish that the Anglophone modernist literature of Dickens, Joyce, Beckett and Huxley allows him to comment on and attempt to negate false consciousness in specific, practical ways. In turn, my presentation of Adorno's conception of modernist literature allows me to include writers in my study that have not been conventionally understood as modernist in the English literary canon, from Dickens to Huxley.[23] I intervene in the field of Adornian and Literary Studies to show that Anglophone literature was central to the development of Adorno's critical theory.

as Jenemann states, the objective of his book was to show that "contrary to the widely held belief that Adorno criticised American cultural practices from afar, he was in fact deeply enmeshed in those practices—he really did know the American radio industry; he knew the television industry; he knew Hollywood." (186). However, whilst Jenemann focused on American culture, I will be focusing on Anglophone literature.

[23] Adorno's theory of modernism allows us to look anew at writers such as Dickens and Huxley – figures who have not conventionally been understood as 'modernist' in English Literary Studies as a discipline. Adorno's approach has a usefully destabilising effect on some of our received ideas of genre and periodisation within literary history.

# Chapter 1 - Adorno and Dickens: Reading Allegorically

On 27 September 1930, Adorno wrote to Siegfried Kracauer to tell him that he was reading *The Old Curiosity Shop* by Charles Dickens (*Briefwechsel* 250). His consumption of this text would mark the beginning of an important intellectual engagement with the famous English novelist that, in turn, would feed back into Adorno's theory on realist and modernist fiction. In a further letter, Adorno announced that he had just delivered a radio lecture about the novel and was wondering if Kracauer knew where he might publish the talk (276). Adorno's desire to see the piece in print would be realised on 18 April 1931 when the *Frankfurter Zeitung* published an article that would become a chapter in the later *Noten Zur Literatur IV* as "On Dickens' The Old Curiosity Shop: A Lecture". Despite Adorno's clear investment in the piece, scholars ranging from the Warwick Research Collective to Anna Kornbluh have perceived Dickens' presence in Adorno's theory as something of a curiosity (WReC 59; Kornbluh 448). For them, Dickens seems like an exception to Adorno's investment in a high modernist literary canon. Therefore, there is still work to be done to show how this essay on Dickens accords with Adorno's wider project of literary theory. Broadly, I look at how Adorno established his enduring thesis that literature could be used to critique and counter reification in the allegorical reading he advances through *The Old Curiosity Shop*.

Adorno's lecture on *The Old Curiosity Shop* certainly assumes that his audience would be familiar with the novel, opening with the statement: "Today, ladies and gentlemen, I will not introduce you to a new book, nor call your attention to one you have forgotten. Instead, I would like to talk about one whose title is generally familiar, a book that may still be widely read, especially by children." (*NTL2* 171). Adorno's appreciation of Dickens can be understood within the wider German reception of the author. As Antje Anderson and Norbert Lennartz have shown, in both the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, Dickens was one of the most popular British authors in Germany (Anderson 19; Lennartz 42).[24] German intellectuals were often as enthusiastic

[24] Anderson has described how Dickens was especially popular in mid-nineteenth-century Germany: "Dickens was among the most popular of British authors in Germany in the nineteenth century. Between 1837, when early instalments of *Pickwick* appeared, and 1849-50, when *David Copperfield* was translated, Dickens was more widely read than any other British novelist, and perhaps more admired than any German novelist." (19). Lennartz adds: "Anselm Schlösser is certainly right when he writes in his 1937 study *Die englisch Literatur in*

about Dickens as the reading public. In 1854, Karl Marx praised the depiction of the middle class by "Dickens and Thackeray, Miss Brontë and Mrs. Gaskell", arguing that these contemporaneous writers formed a "present splendid brotherhood of fiction-writers in England […] whose graphic and eloquent pages have issued to the world more political and social truths than have been uttered by all the professional politicians, publicists and moralists put together." ("The English" 105). Although the German interest in Dickens decreased in the twentieth century, Lennartz stresses that the writer left an imprint on some of the most important modernist writers in the German-speaking world (35). For instance, Thomas Mann cited Dickens as one of his earliest English literary influences ("As a youth I received many lasting impressions from English literature, especially from Dickens and Thackeray [,]"), whilst the German-speaking writer Kafka used *David Copperfield* as an inspiration for his own unfinished novel *Amerika* (Mann qtd. in Cerf 235; Kafka 188).[25]

Adorno's lecture must also be understood as a piece of literary criticism that was operating against a generally more negative reception of *The Old Curiosity Shop.* After Dickens' death, many more critics began to forcefully dismiss the cult of Nell that had emerged out of the text's early reception.[26] These detractors held that the work was far too sentimental to be of great critical worth. This dismissive conclusion continued to affect the reception of the novel in literary circles into the twentieth century. Famous Anglophone literary critics such as F.R. Leavis concluded that Little Nell was of little analytical interest or worth (Leavis qtd. in John Bowen 13). The same view was also aired by German critics, most notably by Karl Bleibtreu, who fiercely denounced the text's excessive mawkishness (Bleibtreu qtd. in Lennartz 36). Adorno's reading was notable for resisting this dominant narrative surrounding the text's apparent unsalvageable quality.[27] Certainly, Adorno was not

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*Deutschland von 1895 bis 1934* [*English Literature in Germany from 1895 to 1934*] that Dickens is the most popular British author in Germany [.]" (42).

[25] In *The Diaries of Franz Kafka Vol. 2,* Kafka's diary entry dated 8 October 1917 reads: "Dickens' *Copperfield.* 'The Stoker' a sheer imitation of Dickens, the projected novel seems even more so." (188).

[26] See, for example, Oscar Wilde's alleged declaration in *Letters to the Sphinx* that: "One must have a heart of stone to read the death of Little Nell without laughing." (n.p.).

[27] But it is important that we do not overestimate the impact of Adorno's intervention on Dickensian criticism during the 1930s; as Lennartz has commented, Adorno could not "revive" the so-called "tepid-academic interest in Dickens' novels" during the decade (42). Adorno's reading of the novel received more attention from literary critics after the essay was published in the fourth volume of *Noten Zur Literatur*. Accordingly, Adorno made a note in the revised and reprinted version of the lecture in 1967 that: "The text published here belongs to the author's youth. It originally appeared in the feuilleton of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in the early 1930s, certainly before 1933." (*NTL2* ix).

alone in his sympathy for Dickens - his friends Mann and Benjamin regarded Dickens warmly - yet Adorno's ability to see a critical potential in the much-maligned figure of Nell in the 1930s was a more unusual approach than one might expect from the characteristically cynical theorist.[28] As we will see, Adorno does not eschew the sentimental function of Nell, but actually presents her innocence as a resistant quality. He not only considers her to be an anachronistic remnant of a nostalgically presented pre-capitalist world, but he also interprets her as a figure that is too good for capitalism, ushering instead to a better world. Adorno's approach is unusual because it reveals an uncharacteristic naiveté by reading *The Old Curiosity Shop* on Dickens' own terms. Indeed, Adorno's readings of the various aspects of the text, from Nell to the countryside, are often mere re-descriptions of Dickens' much criticised moral cartoons, from the depiction of Nell as the representation of all that is good, to the view of the city as the breeding-ground of all that is bad.[29] This uncharacteristically deferential reading of Dickens is what makes Adorno's interpretation so intriguing. As we shall see, his readings of other authors – Joyce, Beckett and Huxley – are less compliant or trusting.

Adorno's recognition of *The Old Curiosity Shop* as a tool for developing his critical theory of literature was clearly influenced in part by his conversations with Walter Benjamin. On 10 November 1930, Benjamin wrote a letter that makes it clear that Adorno had read and formulated an interpretation of the work and was pressing him to do the same:

> You should be very pleased to learn that your gently insistent remarks about 'The Old Curiosity Shop' have finally defeated my external inhibitions on the subject, and that I have been absorbed in the book for some days now; awareness of the way in which you have already read it makes me feel as though someone with a lamp were guiding me along these dark passageways. I have seen the most astonishing veins of silver light up before me. (*The Complete* 7).

[28] See, for example, Adorno's description of sentimentality as a "shabby imitation of real feeling" in *The Stars Down to Earth* (225).
[29] I would venture that Adorno is doing this precisely to ward off the idea that Dickens' realism discounts him from being a modernist writer. But this motivation should not distract from the fact that Adorno's approach to Dickens' work is surprisingly unsuspicious.

Adorno drafted his lecture on the novel during the period that he became deeply invested in Benjamin's ideas and work, especially Benjamin's thesis *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* [*Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*] [1928]. Benjamin's influence on Adorno's Dickens talk is confirmed in the correspondence between Adorno and Kracauer. When Adorno asked his friend what he thought of his Dickens' essay, Kracauer replied that whilst the piece was excellently written, he had reservations about Benjamin's influence on its philosophical content (*Briefe* 282). But the philosophical influence also went in the other direction. Years later, Benjamin would go on to quote a fragment of Adorno's Dickens lecture in his magnum opus *The Arcades Project* (208). As we will see, whilst this intellectual exchange with Benjamin held great sway on Adorno's criticism on the novel, it did not completely determine Adorno's approach to the text and its author.

Adorno owned at least four Dickens novels in German translation in his personal library.[30] For instance, he owned the 1922 edition of Leo Feld's German translation of *The Old Curiosity Shop* [*Der Raritätenladen*] that was published by Insel Verlag. Adorno appears to have drawn from this particular edition for his lecture – indeed, the extracts that Adorno quotes from Dickens' novel are from the German translation. He also owned German-language editions of *David Copperfield* [1923], *Martin Chuzzlewit* [1920] and *Nicholas Nickleby* [*Nikolaus Nickleby*] [1920], all also published by Insel Publishers. In what remains of Adorno's library, there are also at least three pieces of secondary criticism on Dickens: Wolfgang Wickardt's academic study *Die Formen der Perspektive in Charles Dickens' Romanen, ihr sprachlicher Ausdruck und ihre strukturelle Bedeutung* [1933], Helmut Viebrock's article "The Knocker: Physiognomical Aspects of a Motif in Hoffmann and Dickens" [1962] and Viebrock's review of Philip Collins' book *Dickens and Crime* [1962] from 1963. In his theory, Adorno mentions Dickens extensively in "On Dickens' The Old Curiosity Shop: A Lecture" (*NTL2* 171-77) and then references the author very briefly in *Minima Moralia* (225), "Extorted Reconciliation" (*NTL1* 228), and "Trying to Understand Endgame" (*NTL1* 266).

The studies that have examined Adorno's interest in Dickens have paid particular attention to Adorno's lecture on *The Old Curiosity Shop* rather than the more passing references in his other

[30] Please note that Adorno's existing personal library is acknowledged to be incomplete, so it is not possible to know every novel that he owned.

writings. Michael Hollington's translation of the lecture into English in 1989 for *Dickens Quarterly* sparked further interest in the lecture in Anglophone criticism, leading to more studies by scholars working in Dickens Studies and Victorian Studies.[31] Some of the most significant, extensive and insightful studies of Adorno's lecture on Dickens include: Michael Hollington's articles "Adorno, Benjamin and The Old Curiosity Shop" [1989] and "The Voice of Objects in The Old Curiosity Shop" [2009], David Suchoff's "New Historicism and Containment: Toward a Post-Cold War Cultural Theory" [1992], John Bowen's "Spirit and the Allegorical Child" [2000], Esther Leslie's "Walter Benjamin and the Cheerful Destruction of the Self", Elisabeth Gitter's article "Dickens' 'Dombey and Son' and the Anatomy of Coldness" [2004], Helen Small's "The Bounded Life: Adorno, Dickens, and Metaphysics" [2004], Jeremy Tambling's *Going Astray: Dickens and London* [2009], Andrew McCann's "Ruins, Refuse, and the Politics of Allegory in The Old Curiosity Shop" [2011], Gillian Piggott's *Dickens and Benjamin: Moments of Revelation and Fragments of Modernity* [2012], David Spurr's *Architecture and Modern Literature* [2012], Norbert Lennartz's "The Reception of Dickens in Germany: 1900-45" [2013], Stephanie Polsky's *Ignoble Displacement: Dispossessed Capital in Neo-Dickensian London* [2015], Sarah Winter's "The Old Curiosity Shop and Master Humphrey's Clock" [2018] and Anna Kornbluh's "Objectively Curious Commitments" [2020].[32] These critics have identified the central core of Adorno's interpretation of Dickens: that the Dickensian allegory is a tool of great critical potential.

However, Adorno's early interest in a canonical Victorian writer is nevertheless mischaracterised as being at odds with his general literary theory. For example, in *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature* [2015], the Warwick Research Collective (WReC) goes as far as describing Adorno's work on Dickens as being at "right angles to

[31] See Hollington's translation "A Translation of Adorno's 'Rede über den "Raritatenladen" von Charles Dickens'" [1989] (95-101).

[32] Other critics have mentioned Adorno's reading of Dickens, but more in passing. See, for example: Benjamin Noys' essay "'Grey in Grey': Crisis, Critique, Change" [2011] (46), Emily Caroline McArthur's thesis entitled *Emotional Investments: British Childhood and the Liberal Ideal 1800-1870* [2015] (23-26, 52-55), Claire Wood's book *Dickens and the Business of Death* [2015] (59, 69), and Joshua Gooch's chapter "The Anxiety of Inheritance: Work and the Impasses of Accumulation in Dickens' The Old Curiosity Shop" [2018] (190) and his book *Dickensian Affects: Charles Dickens and Feelings of Precarity* [2019] (102). Please also note that Esther Leslie's article has no date attached to it.

his generally critical approach to the English novelist" and his generally critical approach to literary realism (59). Of course, this characterisation of Dickens as a realist writer can be challenged if we consider that his writing was also gothic, deeply comical and self-consciously allegorical. However, for the purposes of this chapter, we will look at how Adorno himself considered Dickens to be a writer that was often realist and yet often deeply anti-realist. While Adorno seems surprisingly well-disposed to Dickens' brand of moralism, a dualistic understanding of realist and modernist aesthetics has obscured Adorno's enthusiastic use of Dickens' work for his own project of critiquing false consciousness in capitalism. Even if the allegorical aspect of Adorno's interpretation of Dickens is well established in the scholarship, the relevance of Dickensian allegory to other parts of Adorno's thought has not been adequately addressed. Not only do critics tend to gloss over the fact that Adorno's theory of allegory is not identical to Benjaminian allegory, but Adorno's use of allegory in the lecture has not been adequately situated within his thoughts on reification, especially where reification intersects with his thoughts on realist and modernist literature.

With these issues in mind, this chapter will redress the misconception that Adorno's lecture on Dickens does not fit within his wider theory of modernism. Generally, I will argue that Adorno's turn to this ostensibly realist author should provoke us to have a more expansive understanding of how Adornian literary theory was established and operates. Specifically, this chapter argues that Adorno draws upon *The Old Curiosity Shop* to propose a specific theory of allegory to resist reification in capitalist society. The refusal of Dickensian allegories to ascribe a single, ultimate meaning to the text – for example, in the figure of Nell or the ruined objects of the coins given to her - is a block that dialectically impels the reader to make an interpretation that will allow them to glimpse into the non-identity between what capitalist society claims to be, what capitalist society truly is, and what society could be instead.

I will set up this argument by first situating Adorno's turn to Dickens' allegory within his theory of reification, or the discrepancy between the object and concept. This section will outline the philosophical background of his interest in Dickens' literature (and, indeed, the literature of the other Anglophone writers in this thesis) as that which diagnoses and resists false consciousness. Second, I will show how his appreciation of Dickens complicates Adorno's position in his dispute with Lukács

on the topic of modernism and realism. Whilst Lukács privileges the realism of writers such as Dickens, Adorno does not dismiss Dickensian realism, but instead makes the case that Dickens' realism has a modernist quality. By focusing on his lecture on *The Old Curiosity Shop*, I will show how Adorno developed an allegorical reading that suggests the novel's critical quality is found in its split of the image and its meaning. This section will be followed by a discussion of how Adorno locates the escape from capitalism in the allegory of Nell and her death, offering a strangely deferential view of Nell: that she represents a point of escape for the reader as the representative of all that is good and opposed to capitalism. However, the end of the lecture suddenly discounts its own reading of Nell. The chapter will end by studying Adorno's strange diversion to the allegory of coins at the end of his lecture. I conclude that Adorno presents a reading of *The Old Curiosity Shop* that casts the novel as a crypt: an object that is at once dead and also cryptic in that it resists and provokes interpretation.

Adorno saw Dickens, therefore, as a proto-modernist writer who exemplified literature's ability to grasp the disjuncture between the concept and object of capitalist society (i.e. between capitalism's representation of itself and its actual operation). This perspective allows us to demystify the status of realist literature in Adornian theory: Adorno's Dickensian lecture indicates that realism and modernism were not purely antithetical in his thinking. The canonical Victorian writer can be understood as a crucial influence on Adorno's development of a theory of a modernist, critical literature. Finally, this chapter will hopefully offer a more nuanced way of understanding Adorno's theory of allegory by demonstrating the complicated relationship he had with his contemporaries' readings of Dickens, from Lukács to Benjamin.

**1. Reification**

To understand Adorno's turn to Dickens, I will first show where this turn fits in with Adorno's broader project of identifying specifically *critical* art that would resist reification. The notion of a critical art form was only fully elaborated in Adorno's later writings but, as I will argue, it was already latent in his 1931 essay on Dickens. This chapter takes its understanding of "reification" from Gillian Rose's seminal study on Adorno entitled *The Melancholy Science* [1978], which deftly

outlines Adorno's own theory of reification in a dedicated chapter.[33] Just as she makes the important point that reification was a multifaceted, even vague idea that had been mistakenly assumed to be a concept directly coined and developed by the likes of Marx or Hegel (for example, Marx offered a theory of commodity fetishism that Marxists such as Lukács then adapted into an idea of reification), she argues that Adorno had a unique and specific definition of reification. As Rose elaborates: "Adorno's theory of reification was based on commodity fetishism in a way which depended not on Marx's theory of work or the labour-process (alienation) but on Marx's theory of value, especially on the distinction between use-value and exchange-value." (*The Melancholy* 28, 43).[34] Although in this extract Rose neglects the fact that Adorno's understanding of reification did sometimes encompass the replacement of the "social relation between men" for the "phantasmagoric form of a relation between things" (as we will see later in this chapter'), she is correct that the general impetus of Adorno's understanding of reification is towards Marx's theory of value in which the exchange value (i.e. a quantitative relation that allows the exchange of one sort of value for another) arises from its "total

[33] Adorno's notion of reification has been examined extensively in the secondary criticism. See, for example: Gillian Rose's DPhil thesis *Reification as a Sociological Category: Theodor W. Adorno's Concept of Reification and the Possibility of a Critical Theory of Society* [1976/7] and book *The Melancholy Science* [1978], Habermas' *The Theory of Communicative Action* [1981], Martin Jay's *Adorno* [1984], Martin Jay's *Marxism and Totality* [1984], David Ingram's chapter "From Lukács to Adorno: Rationalisation as Reification" in his book *Habermas and the Dialectic of Reason* [1987], David Roberts' *Art and Enlightenment: Aesthetic Theory After Adorno* [1991], Deborah Cook's "The Sundered Totality: Adorno's Freudo-Marxism" [1995], Deborah Cook's *The Culture Industry Revisited: Theodor W. Adorno on Mass Culture* [1996], Steven Vogel's chapter "Adorno and Nature as the Nonidentical" in his book *Against Nature: The Concept of Nature in Critical Theory* [1996], Timothy Bewes' *Reification, Or, The Anxiety of Late Capitalism* [2002], Shane Gunster's chapter "Dreams of Redemption? Adorno Benjamin and the Dialectics of Culture" in his book *Capitalizing on Culture: Critical Theory for Cultural Studies* [2004], Espen Hammer's *Adorno and the Political* [2005], Asher Horowitz's chapter "Mystical Kernels? Rational Shells? Habermas and Adorno on Reification and Re-enchantment" [2007], James Schmidt's *Theodor Adorno* [2007], Shea Coulson's *Adorno's Aesthetics of Critique* [2007], Axel Honneth's *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea* [2008], Frédéric Vandenberghe's chapter "Theodor W. Adorno: Anti-System and Reification" in his book *A Philosophical History of German Sociology* [2009], Brian O'Connor's chapter "Adorno on the Destruction of Memory" [2010], Harry F. Dahms' *The Vitality of Critical Theory* [2011], Terri Hall's article "Reification, Materialism, and Praxis: Adorno's Critique of Lukacs" [2011], Christopher Buck's chapter "The Utopian Content of Reification: Adorno's Critical Social Theory of Nature" [2013], Leigh Wilson's *Modernism and Magic* [2013], Jennifer Rich's *Adorno: A Critical Guide* [2015], Anita Chari's chapter "The Reversibility of Reification: Adorno from the Aesthetic to the Social" in her book *A Political Economy of the Senses* [2015], Peter E. Gordon's *Adorno and Existence* [2016], Samir Gandesha's edited collection *The Spell of Capital: Reification and Spectacle* [2017], Corey McCall's chapter "Against the Reification of History: Benjamin and Adorno on Baudelaire" [2018], Todd Hedrik's book *Reconciliation and Reification* [2018], Harriet Johnson's article "The Reification of Nature: Reading Adorno in a Warming World" [2019], Surti Singh's article "Dark Play: Aesthetic Resistance in Lukács, Benjamin and Adorno" [2019], Thomas Telios' chapter "Why Still Reification? Towards a Critical Social Ontology" [2019] and Michael J. Thompson's chapter "Adorno's Reception of Weber and Lukács" [2020].

[34] See Rose's comment that: "As this elaboration of Adorno's theory of reification indicates, the theory is grounded in Marx's theory of value in a highly selective fashion." (*The Melancholy* 47).

abstraction from" the commodity's use value (Marx, "Capital" 27-28). Marx argues that this transubstantiation from use to exchange value is especially problematic in the commodity exchange when the "universal equivalent" is used (namely, in the money form) as a way of exchanging two qualitatively different commodities as if they were the same when they are judged to have the same quantity of exchange value (28, 61). Rose's thesis is that Adorno applies this problem of the exchange principle – i.e. that it renders two "unlike things alike" - to the issue of identification: when the concept *falsely* presumes to cover – or be identical with - its object (Rose, *The Melancholy* 46-47; Adorno, *ND* 5).[35] Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* offers a systematic culmination of his idea of reification in which he argues that capitalism's use of oppressive concepts to cover an object, or "identitarian thinking" must be resisted by a *non*-identity thinking (149).[36]

Adorno considered how he could achieve this non-identity thinking through literature, thereby developing an aesthetic theory that was an eclectic mix of fragments from Kantian and Hegelian philosophy.[37] First, Adorno follows Hegel's critique of Kant's speculative idea of an unknowable

[35] As Rose puts it: "Identity thinking makes unlike things alike. To believe that a concept really covers its object, when it does not, is to believe falsely that the object is the equal of its concept." (*The Melancholy* 46).
[36] For example, in *Minima Moralia* Adorno gives a gendered example of identity thinking: when capitalist patriarchy foisted its false identity of the "feminine" onto the object of "woman" to subsume her under its power (95-96).
[37] Adornian scholarship has frequently discussed the influence of Kant and Hegel on Adorno's aesthetic theory (both in the sense that Adorno adopted, adapted and rejected different elements of their philosophies). See for example: Ronald Robin's "Collingwood and Adorno on the Popular Arts" in his book *The Aesthetics of the Critical Theorists* [1990], Shierry Weber Nicholsen's "Toward a More Adequate Reception of Adorno's 'Aesthetic Theory': Configurational Form in Adorno's Aesthetic Writings" [1991], James Martin Harding's *Adorno and "A Writing of the Ruins": Essays on Modern Aesthetics and Anglo-American Literature and Culture* [1997], William D. Melaney's "Art as a Form of Negative Dialectics: 'Theory' in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory" [1997], Rodolphe Gasche's "The Theory of Natural Beauty and its Evil Star: Kant, Hegel, Adorno" [2002], Yvonne Sherratt's *Adorno's Positive Dialectic* [2004], Robert Hullot-Kentor's *Things Beyond Resemblance: Collected Essays on Theodor W. Adorno* [2006], Espen Hammer's "The Politics of Aesthetic Negativity" in his book *Adorno and the Political* [2006], Shea Coulson's *Adorno's Aesthetic of Critique* [2007], Donald Burke's "On the Dialectic of Natural Beauty and Artistic Beauty" [2009], Anthony J. Cascardi's edited collection *Art and Aesthetics after Adorno* [2010], Donald A. Burke's "Adorno's Aesthetic Rationality: On the Dialectic of Natural and Artistic Beauty" [2011], Richard Stopford's thesis *Adorno's Critique of Judgment: The Recovery of Negativity from the Philosophies of Kant and Hegel* [2012], Miguel de Beistegui's *Aesthetics After Metaphysics: From Mimesis to Metaphor* [2012], Ayon Maharaj's chapter "The Idealist Legacy: Adorno's Dialectical Retrieval of Aesthetic Agency in Aesthetic Theory" in his book *The Dialectics of Aesthetic Agency* [2013], Brian O'Connor's *Adorno* [2013], J. M. Bernstein's "Blind Intuitions: Modernism's Critique of Idealism" [2014], Ross Wilson "Aesthetics" [2014], Espen Hammer's *Adorno's Modernism: Art, Experience, and Catastrophe* [2015], Owen Hulatt's *Adorno's Theory of Philosophical and Aesthetic Truth* [2016], Nathan Ross' *The Philosophy and Politics of Aesthetic Experience: German Romanticism and Critical Theory* [2017], Omid Mehrgan's thesis *The Narrowest Path: Antinomic of Form in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory Analysed Through Kleist, Hegel, and Marx* [2018], Oshrat C. Silberbusch's "Philosophy of Art, Art of Philosophy: Adorno's Aesthetic Utopia" in her book *Adorno's Philosophy of the Nonidentical* [2018], Michael Symonds'

object-in-itself. In the *Critique of Pure Reason,* Kant posed that whilst the subject could grasp the concept of an object, the subject cannot directly know this object; indeed, Kant distinguished between the phenomenal (our experience of appearances) and the noumenal (the object that exists outside human understanding), the latter of which Kant often associated with his proposed concept of the "thing-in-itself" ["*Ding-an-sich*"], or an unknowable, transcendental object that is beyond our experience (347). Adorno interprets Kant's argument as presenting the object as something beyond our concept of it, contending that: "There is nothing that is not transmitted, and yet, as Hegel emphasised, indirectness must always refer to some transmitted thing, without which there would be no indirectness." (*ND* 171). Here, Adorno is following Hegel's criticism of Kant's 'thing-in-itself": both Hegel and Adorno contend that the concept of an object necessarily indicates that we must have some mediated knowledge of the object itself (although, as we will also discuss, Adorno's use of the term "indirect" suggests that the relation is not so strong – for, of course, the conceptual dialectically implies the existence of the nonconceptual as well) (11). As a consequence, Adorno is making the case for taking inspiration from Hegel's move in his *Science of Logic*'s third book "The Doctrine of Concept", where Hegel centres on "the concept of the concept" as a way of grasping the object (514). Adorno takes Hegel's project of reconciling the concept and object in the specific sense that there is scope for further examining the relation between a concept we have of an object and the object itself. He casts his turn to Hegel as a reaction against what Adorno himself perceived to be the moments in Kant's philosophy that speculated about the block that might exist between the concept we have of an object and the object itself. Adorno's characterisation of Kant's philosophy here is very much his own interpretation and, with that, he often contradicts himself with his dependency on concepts for conceptualising or even thinking about an object – for example, Adorno's notion of the object itself is dependent on the idea that there is a block on the subject from ever being able to find a concept that fully covers the object.

It is also important to note that Adorno then tempers the unifying character of Hegel's idea of *total* reconciliation between the concept and object. Hegel sought to approach a concept that does not

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*The Appeal of Art in Modernity* [2019], Mario Farina's *Adorno's Aesthetics as a Literary Theory of Art* [2020] and Eva Geulen's "Adorno's Aesthetic Theory" [2020].

cover its object by offering a dialectical method that would eventually result in a perfect concept that can be reconciled and unified with its object. This process aligns with the three moments of Hegel's dialectic: the first moment of understanding a certain concept, the second dialectical moment of setting the concept against what it is not, and then the third speculative moment which, in cancelling, preserving and unifying the two previous moments, produces a higher concept than the one that preceded it. As Hegel testified:

> Because the result, the negation, is a determinate negation, it has a content. It is a new concept but one higher and richer than the preceding – richer because it negates or opposes the preceding and therefore contains it, and it contains even more than that, for it is the unity of itself and its opposite. – It is above all in this way that the system of concepts is to be erected – and it has to come to completion in an unstoppable and pure progression that admits of nothing extraneous. (*Science* 33).

Here, Hegel is arguing that a concept gradually moves closer to "completion" as a universal concept (in other words, to fully covering its object), a teleological argument that suggests that the concept and object will eventually be fully reconciled into "the absolute Idea." (734). Although Adorno follows various aspects of Hegel's dialectics, he chides Hegel for ultimately offering an unacceptably positive dialectic. He argues that Hegel's conclusion merely reinforces the "untruth of identity" pushed by capitalism, or the false idea that the concept merely "exhausts" the object (*ND* 5).[38] As Adorno elaborates: "The fundament and result of Hegel's substantive philosophizing was the primacy of the subject, or - in the famous phrase from the Introduction to his *Logic* - the "identity of identity and nonidentity.'" (7). Adorno's formulation of the "identity of identity and nonidentity" accuses Hegel of performing identity thinking by merely collapsing the gap between concept and object (something which Adorno did not think was desirable nor totally possible) rather than genuinely interrogating that gap (172). After all, Adorno positioned himself against Hegel's drive to totality in his dialectics, as indicated by his inversion of Hegel's dictum "the whole is the true" to "the whole is

[38] A coarse claim that arguably moves too swiftly from a historicised ontology to a specific mode of production.

the false" (Hegel, *Phenomenology* 81; Adorno, *MM* 50). To counter Hegel's positive turn of seeking the identity of identity and nonidentity, Adorno's project of a "negative dialectics" explicitly names his desire to turn the Hegelian dialectical method into a negative one by bringing back the aspect of unknowability from Kant's speculative idea of the thing-in-itself – in other words, to know about the object indirectly through the *non-identity* of identity and nonidentity (*ND* 12).[39]

Adorno then reintroduces an element of what he calls the "Kantian block" for his idea of a philosophy that critically uses the concept to approach the object (*Kant's* 75). In *Negative Dialectics,* Adorno claims that he does not dismiss Kant's hypothesis of the thing-in-itself wholesale on the way to formulating a less limited understanding of the gap between object and concept:

> It lies in the definition of negative dialectics that it will not come to rest in itself, as if it were total. This is its form of hope. Kant registered some of this in his doctrine of the transcendent thing-in-itself, beyond the mechanisms of identification. His successors, however stringently they criticised the doctrine, were reinforcing the spell, regressing like the post-revolutionary bourgeoisie as a whole: they hypostatised coercion itself as the absolute. Kant on his part, in defining the thing-in-itself as the intelligible being, had indeed conceived transcendence as nonidentical, but in equating it with the absolute subject he had bowed to the identity principle after all. (406-07).

Of course, the dubious assertion about Kant in the final line demonstrates Adorno's reticence to be seen as adopting Kant's philosophy wholesale – due, in part to Adorno's rather uncharitable reading of Kant's self-confessed speculative idea of the thing-in-itself - as well as Adorno's aversion to what he sees as the part of Kant's philosophy that unacceptably grounds being in the subject.[40] And yet he still perceives in the idea of the block a crucial element of negativity. Adorno admits that it is precisely this aspect of the limitation on thought that should be integrated into a more sophisticated

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[39] As Adorno comments, his goal of *Negative Dialectics* is as follows: "To change this direction of conceptuality, to give it a turn toward nonidentity, is the hinge of negative dialectics." (12).

[40] For example, Adorno's comment here that Kant is "defining the thing-in-itself as the intelligible being" downplays the fact that Kant's concept of the thing-in-itself was a hypothesis and not a fully verifiable assertion, as the thing-in-itself implies that it exceeds intelligibility. See also Adorno's comment that Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* offers both "an identity philosophy – that is, a philosophy that attempts to ground being in the subject – and also a non-identity philosophy – one that attempts to restrict that claim to identity by insisting on the obstacles, the *block*, encountered by the subject in its search for knowledge." (*Kant's* 66).

understanding of dialectics, especially as he is taken by the idea that there is ultimately a block on being able to *fully* grasp the object. In short, Adorno mediates between what he presents as Kant's block on and Hegel's total grasp of the object. If we revisit Adorno's comment on how one should have an "indirect" knowledge of the object, he was arguing that one can gain knowledge of the object negatively rather than directly. In this case, he pushes the idea of a non-identity thinking, which he defines as a thinking that grasps the non-identity – or the disjuncture - between the concept and the object: "*Contradiction* is not what Hegel's absolute idealism was bound to transfigure it into: it is not of the essence in a Heraclitean sense. It indicates the untruth of identity, the fact that the concept does not exhaust the thing conceived." (5). Here, Adorno comes closer to Kant's argument in *Critique of Judgement* that the aesthetic object triggers the search for a concept that can never be attained (54). Adorno is not only arguing that one must acknowledge the quality of the non-identity between a concept and the object, but that it is this very act of acknowledging this difference that critically allows us to grasp knowledge of the contradiction between the identities that have falsely proclaimed to cover their objects, and the objects themselves. It is the self-conscious knowledge of this contradiction that represents to Adorno a kind of breach that acts as a repository of hope. Admittedly, in this part of his logic, Adorno makes an abrupt leap from Kant's transhistorical idealism to Marxist materialism. Adorno sees the non-identical as a critical tool because it suggests that the object can be said to be other than the identity that the capitalist narrative has forced upon it. Adorno holds that capitalism has often obscured the fact of the object's non-identity with its presumed identity because its very presence, its very otherness disproves the narrative of capitalist totality itself: "The slightest remnant of nonidentity sufficed to deny an identity conceived as total." (*ND* 22).

This summary of Adorno's formulation of a non-identity thinking to resist reification helps us to understand why Adorno privileged art (specifically, literature) to enact this very non-identity thinking. Adorno's view of the critical power of aesthetics emerges from his engagement with Kantian and Hegelian mediations on the beautiful. Adorno's view of art as the preserve of the non-identical is largely grounded in the second moment of Kant's theory of the beautiful in the *Critique of Judgement*: "[The] beautiful is that which pleases universally without a concept." (Kant 61 qtd. in Adorno, *AT* 94). Here, we can see that Adorno draws upon Kant's notion that the beautiful is

something that refuses to be identical with a concept, which for Adorno accords with his aim of resisting reification. It is important to note, however, that Kant located "the beautiful" specifically in nature. Whilst Adorno agreed with Kant that there was a "trace of the nonidentical" in nature, he suggested that the aim of resisting the identity thinking of the concept was better realised in a kind of beauty that was bound up with - yet distinct from - natural beauty. In *Aesthetic Theory,* Adorno elaborated that, as instrumental reason had already dominated nature with its spell of universal identity (which he describes as when "progress […] does violence to the surface of the earth"), reification – or "the subsumption of "nonidentical in things under the spell of universal identity" - cannot be perceived or negated by natural beauty alone (73-74). In its stead, Adorno reasons that this reification of nature can only be countered by what is not nature: "art beauty" (65-67). Adorno suggests that art ushers towards and, importantly, realises what he calls the "*more*" first hinted by nature, or the nonidentical otherness that resists and overruns what exists under capitalism (78). He argues that art is best placed to critique the exchange principle that sees the object and concept as one and the same, arguing that art's autonomy from empirical reality not only helps us to become cognisant of reification (i.e. "aware in art of what rationality has erased from memory"), but that it also hints at what is being violently determined by the concept (i.e. "a being-in-itself that does not yet exist") (67, 78, 83).[41] On this point of aesthetic critique, however, Adorno was still insisting on tempering his Kant with his Hegel just as he had in his theory of reification; he takes issue with Kant's presentation of the beautiful as that without any concept for promoting "pure intuitability" and thereby making little room for understanding (73). Understanding the object via concepts remains equally central to his aesthetic critique (100). This qualification betrays how Adorno spent his life developing the thesis that art forms such as literature could offer a non-instrumental, non-identical thinking. Adorno defends this move by making a crucial distinction that mediates between two of his major philosophical influences: that although art is not necessarily conceptual in itself, it needs to negate reification *via* the concept (73).

[41] As Adorno puts it in *Aesthetic Theory*: "[Artworks] are not only the other of the empirical world: Everything in them becomes other." (81).

Having outlined Adorno's conception of reification, we can now contextualise Adorno's turn to Dickens' literature as a prime example of the kind of critical aesthetics that would point to and negate reification. Indeed, in the first volume of *Notes to Literature,* Adorno privileged the novel form as one of the aesthetic forms *par excellence* for this particular aim: "[reification] needs to be called by name […] and the novel is qualified to do so as few other art forms are." (32). Adorno's essay "The Essay as Form" ["Der Essay als Form"] [1958] sheds light on why the novel is so epistemically privileged in his theory. As a writer himself, he treats certain textual bodies as speculative and formally open, offering a space that allows "for the consciousness of nonidentity, without expressing it directly; it is radical in its non-radicalism, in refraining from any reduction to a principle, in its accentuation of the partial against the total, in its fragmentary character." (9). In general, Adorno's idea of a critical literature that would be able to name and point out the discrepancy between the object and subject is often given the name modernist literature in Adornian Studies, a label which has its roots in Adorno's defence of modernist literature against its critic Lukács in a famous debate in the 1950s.[42] We will now see how Dickens, despite being something of a theoretical football in this debate, surprisingly fits into Adorno's idea of critical literature.

**2. The Modernism and Realism Debate**

In the beginning of his lecture on Dickens, Adorno anticipates that the audience might find it surprising to hear him advocate for the Victorian writer's works (*NTL2* 171). Indeed, to fully understand why Adorno included Dickens as a critical writer, especially alongside such explicitly *modernist* figures such as Joyce or Beckett, we first need to pinpoint where Dickens sits in Adorno's thoughts on modernism and realism. I will briefly contextualise Adorno's engagement with Dickens within his famous critique of Lukács' views on modernist and realist literature.[43] As the debate between Adorno and Lukács is so well known (and will be discussed in more detail in "Chapter 2"), its main elements can be rather briefly and schematically set out here:

[42] See my discussion of the concept of "Adornian modernism" in the introduction of this thesis.
[43] I will go into more detail on Adorno's critique of Lukács' view on modernist writers such as James Joyce in the next chapter.

a) In *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* [1957], Lukács argued that realist literature was the only literary form that could counter reification (9).[44] Like Adorno, Lukács drew upon Kant and Hegel for his own understanding of reification. In his earlier work, Lukács had expressed that Kant's division of the phenomena (appearances) and the noumena (things-in-themselves) represented the disjuncture between subject and object in a reified society – i.e. that the subject could not directly know the object (*History* 155). Lukács subsequently followed Hegel's critique of the Kantian gap between phenomena and noumena, which provoked him to adopt a Hegelian dialectical philosophy that aimed to grasp the totality of life.[45] Lukács offered the argument that a reified society had obscured the social processes that underlined society ("Realism" 39). To escape this reification, Lukács held that one must not merely observe surface phenomena (the immediate), but that one needed to reconcile this immediacy with the "deeper elements and trends of reality" (i.e. essence) ("Appearance" 18).[46] In other words, Lukács' solution was to grasp the social totality that lay beneath the perceptible surface of life ("Realism" 48). His work was especially concerned with the revolutionary potential of the working class as the subject that would overcome capitalism and its reification (a confidence that Adorno clearly did not share) (56-57). Lukács takes up a Hegelian view towards countering reification by arguing that the individual, in their specific case, needs to grasp their peculiar condition as dialectically part of a greater social collective, so that they can glimpse universality within the particular (33, 36). Due to art's unique status in bourgeois society, Lukács reasoned that *realist* fiction would be the vehicle to facilitate this transition, arguing that its "particular form by means of which objective reality is reflected" made it fit for "grasp[ing] reality as it truly is" (33).

[44] It is important to note that whilst Lukács held onto his support for realist fiction during his career, the failure of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution meant that the elderly Lukács was forced to be more self-critical of his revolutionary Communist politics. As a result, Lukács revised his idea of "social realism" into "critical realism" in the 1960s.

[45] Although Adorno's and Lukács' respective theories of critical literature combined similar elements of Kantian and Hegelian thought, both figures ended up with opposing standpoints.

[46] See also the following comment by Lukács in "Realism in the Balance": "So the crux of the matter is to understand the correct dialectical unity of appearance and essence." (33).

b) Lukács defended realism against what he saw as the most reified form of literature: modernism ("Realism" 36-37, 57-58). Lukács argued that modernism was a "decadent", "fragmentary" aesthetic that, in its fetish for "abstract" techniques, prevented ordinary people from being able to understand its contorted form (39, 44, 57). Contrasting the apparent difficulty of modernism against what he saw as the accessibility of realism, he concluded that modernist writers and theorists had no interest in offering their writing as a vehicle for the revolutionary working classes to overthrow capitalism (57). He insisted that modernism was only interested in what was immediate (i.e. its engrossment in the world as it seems on the surface) and thereby failed to reconcile this immediacy with the essence underlying that surface (i.e. how reality really is) (39, 51). Consequently, Lukács concluded that modernism merely affirms the dislocation of social totality from the mere appearances of society ("Realism" 37-38 and *The Meaning* 92). This conclusion is at the heart of Lukács' view of modernism as the aesthetic of reification. He held that modernist writers' abstract narrative techniques not only failed to grasp the social totality, but that they also served capitalism's aim of obscuring this very totality.

c) In "Extorted Reconciliation" [1958], Adorno reacted against Lukács' opposition of realism against modernism, contending that modernism was the critical form that would reflect social reality in the fight against reification. Adorno asserted that the experimental techniques and forms of Proust, Kafka, Joyce and Beckett better reflected so-called reality than realist literature because they did so negatively: "Art does not come to know reality by depicting it photographically or 'perspectivally' but by expressing, through its autonomous constitution, what is concealed by the empirical form reality takes. Even the assertion that the world is unknowable, which Lukács never tires of faulting in authors like Eliot or Joyce, can become a moment of knowledge, knowledge of the gulf between the overwhelming and unassimilatable world of objects, on the one hand, and experience, which glances helplessly off that world, on the other." (*NTL1* 227). Here, Adorno is anticipating what would eventually become a central thesis of his aesthetic theory: that the autonomy of art in bourgeois society meant that critical literary art necessarily distances itself from so-called reality. By presenting "empirical reality"

> as a false totality, (i.e. revealing that capitalism negates reality as it really is), Adorno argues that it is precisely modernist art's use of fragmentation and other techniques to provide a negative image of society that allows art to offer knowledge of the disjuncture between the experience of society grasped by the individual whose oppression is obscured in society, and the actual object of that oppressive society.

Dickens is one of the main Anglophone writers who occupies an important yet slippery place within this debate between Lukács and Adorno.

To some extent, Dickens appears as an example of the realist literature that Lukács defends and that Adorno criticises in this exchange. For instance, when Lukács outlined the names of realist writers who would be best at facilitating the revolution, he named Dickens as one of his examples.[47] In "Realism in the Balance" [1938], Lukács includes Dickens amongst the realist writers who, in arranging the different parts of their novels (i.e. the specifics of their characters) within their "overall objective social context", successfully reflect the social totality (33, 36). In his response, Adorno mentions Dickens when he voices his disapproval of Lukács' use of bourgeois realist writers to attack modernist writers such as Proust, Kafka, Joyce, and Beckett (*NTL1* 221, 227). As he elaborates:

> The opposition between realistic and 'formalistic' approaches which he inquisitorially elevates to a criterion is simply unsalvageable. On the one hand, the formal principles that are anathema to Lukács as being unrealistic and idealistic prove to have an objective aesthetic function; conversely, the early nineteenth-century novels he unhesitatingly advances as paradigmatic, Dickens and Balzac, are not so realistic after all. (227).

Adorno's comment that "Dickens and Balzac, are not so realistic after all" could first be read as a dismissal of Dickens' work as a representative of Lukács' sense of realism.[48] This interpretation could be read in light of Adorno's criticism of realism as uncritically reflective of a reified, empirical

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[47] Lukács also praises the realism of writers such as Balzac, Tolstoy, Thomas Mann, Heinrich Mann and Maxim Gorky ("Realism" 46, 53, 56-57).

[48] As Adorno states: "Even Lukács will hardly be able to get around the fact that the content of works of art is not real in the same sense as social reality. If this distinction were eliminated all work in aesthetics would lose its foundation." (*NTL1* 224)

reality. In this light, Adorno would be claiming that Dickens is not as reflective of "social reality" as the negative fiction of Proust or Beckett. However, Adorno's assessment of Dickens here could be interpreted in a second, more charitable fashion. If we look more closely, he is also suggesting that Dickens' method is not "realistic" in opposition to modernism, but offers a negative aesthetic that is modernist as well.[49] As Adorno's ambiguous comment on Dickens attests, it soon becomes apparent that Dickens is not so easily assigned as a representative of Lukácsian realism and the antithesis of Adornian modernism.

Adorno's essay "Extorted Reconciliation" overlooks the fact that Lukács sometimes rejected Dickens as a genuinely realist author. Lukács' ambivalence towards Dickens is clear in *The Historical Novel* [1937], which argues that the abstract aspect of Dickens' "historical novel[s]" such as *Barnaby Rudge* and *A Tale of Two Cities* fails to reflect social reality as successfully as Dickens' "social novels" *Little Dorrit* or *Dombey and Son* (242-44). Lukács claims that modern historical novels, which take the past rather than the present as their subject, often have fatal weaknesses that are not "corrected by reality", consequently rendering them less representational than social novels (242-44). Lukács is stating here that, in trying to replicate the past, novels such as *A Tale of Two Cities* fail to constitute critical realism because Dickens allows his own moral judgement to disrupt the objective content of the text (243-44). Not only does Dickens' apparently "autonomous", anachronistic assessment of the French Revolution fail to reflect the totality of social reality in Lukács' eyes, but Lukács also charges Dickens with omitting the "social basis" of his characters in his historical novels (244). Similarly, in "Realism in the Balance", Lukács accuses Dickens of a vulgar, abstract understanding of realism in his approach to his characters:

> Precisely because [Thomas Mann] is a *true realist*, a term which in this case signifies primarily that, as a creative artist, he knows exactly who Christian Buddenbrook, who Tonio

[49] It is worth bearing in mind that Adorno is making a distinction between realism as a certain reductive style, and realism as social content. It could be said Adorno buys into the idea of realism as social content. In other words, that genuinely critical literature reflects things more accurately as they are in reality. However, Adorno argues that this critical reflection of social content will not be realised with a realist style, neither in the naturalistic, photographic sense, nor in Lukács' sense of a committed Socialist or Social Realism. Adorno counters that a style that appears as more of a diversion from a subject matter in hand (i.e. modernism) more successfully grasps at the object of how things really are without being dominating.

> Kroger and who Hans Castorp, Settembrini and Naphta are. He does not have to know it in the abstract way that a social scientist would know it; in that sense he may easily make mistakes, as Balzac, Dickens and Tolstoy did before him. (36).

Here, Lukács is claiming that Mann had managed to deliver a superior version of realism, learning from where the great nineteenth-century novelists had mistaken realism for scientific objectivity. Lukács has the role of characters in mind here; the figures that he suggests Mann "knows" - Christian Buddenbrook, Tonio Kroger, Hans Castorp, Settembrini and Naphta - are Mann's own fictional characters.[50] As he would go on to develop into a theory of critical realism in *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, Lukács was consistently concerned with how the author related the individual characters to the objective social context that underlines them.[51] By contrasting Mann's method with the mistakes of the nineteenth-century realist novelists, he is referring back to the alleged "weaknesses" of Dickens' approach in his historical fiction: that he did not show "what area of society [one's characters] arise from and where they are going to." (Lukács, *The Historical* 243 and "Realism" 36).

At the weaker points of Adorno's discussion of how Lukács draws upon Dickens, Adorno has moments where he paints Lukács as a defender of naturalism. Adorno's criticisms of realist fiction are often more specifically critiques of naturalism as a sub-genre of realism. In "The Position of the Narrator", Adorno attacks naturalism for its photographic representation of reality in fiction, claiming that this aesthetic is inherently ignorant of how capitalist society obscures its true form (*NTL1* 30-32).[52] Of course, Adorno is not so uncharitable as to claim this as the intended shape of Lukács' own definition of realism. In "Extorted Reconciliation", Adorno acknowledges that Lukács sought to

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[50] This particular translation obscures the fact that Lukács is arguing that Balzac, Dickens and Tolstoy were guilty of "abstract scientific social analysis" in some of their realist works.

[51] Note how in Lukács' later work such as *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, he is more accepting of the notion of subjectivity, and so expresses this idea in terms of mediating the subjective individual with its objective context (54).

[52] See, for example, Adorno's comments in "The Position of the Narrator", that anyone wishing to offer in literature "concrete reality […] would be guilty of a lie: the lie of delivering himself over to the world with a love that presupposed that the world is meaningful; and he would end up with insufferable kitsch along the lines of a local-colour commercialism. […] *If the novel wants to remain true to its realistic heritage and tell how things really are, it must abandon a realism that only aids the façade in its work of camouflage by reproducing it.* [Italicised by Adorno]." (*NTL1* 30-32).

distinguish naturalism from realism (227).[53] But this clarification does not stop Adorno from suggesting that Lukács' realism is, in practice, problematically naturalistic. Adorno's contention that Lukács favours writers who are "realistic" suggests that Lukácsian realism is a vulgar understanding of critical literature as that which photographically reproduces the surface phenomena of life. However, this is a weak representation of Lukács' argument when we consider that he had a problem with what he saw as the naturalism of *A Tale of Two Cities*. More generally, Lukács presents naturalism as a subset of modernism and not an offshoot of genuine realism, arguing that naturalistic literature assumes that 'reality' is mere immediacy and therefore "deprives life of its poetry' ("Realism" 36 and *The Meaning* 29, 125). Lukács demonstrates this view in his more negative comments on Dickens; if we dig deeper into the brief reference to where realist writers go astray in "Realism in the Balance", we see that he dismisses the moments where Dickens performed "abstract scientific social analysis" ["*abstrakt-wissenschaftlichen sozialen Analyse*"] to get "to know" ["*zu wissen*"] his characters (*Probleme* 218).[54] Here, Lukács is reinforcing his case against naturalism, critiquing the moments when even apparently canonical realists like Dickens take realism too literally as a merely realistic or even vulgar parody of scientific empiricism. By qualifying the social analysis as "*abstrakt-wissenschaftlichen*", Lukács is applying to Dickens his critique of sociological attempts to adopt the scientific method.[55] In *History and Class Consciousness,* Lukács held that an empiricist approach to analysing society was mired in the logic of capitalism to the point that it merely skirted the surface, or that "[it] uncritically accepts the nature of the object as it is given and the laws of that society as the unalterable foundation of 'science'." (7).

With naturalism dismissed by both philosophers in this debate, Adorno's critique of Lukács' use of "realistic" literature is strongest where it attacks Lukács' enthusiasm for social realism. "Extorted Reconciliation" is, in part, an extended attack on how Lukács had tried and failed to reconcile what Adorno saw as his more valuable earlier writings with his desire to adjust to "official

[53] Intriguingly, Adorno also dismisses Lukács' move of distinguishing realism from naturalism, arguing that it undermines his own thesis (*NTL1* 227).
[54] My translation.
[55] For more insights into Lukács' problem with a social science that was informed by the methodology of the natural sciences, see J. Kelemen in *The Rationalism of Georg Lukács* and Thomas William Dunk in *It's a Working Man's Town: Male Working-Class Culture* (Keleman 50; Dunk 24).

communist doctrine" (*NTL1* 216).[56] Although Lukács' later work *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* challenges elements of his earlier conceptions of realism after the failure of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, Adorno argues that Lukács continued to be an apologist for Soviet politics and exceptionalism (240). If we look at Lukács' theory of literary realism in the late 1950s, Adorno is correct that traces of Soviet doctrine can still be found in Lukács' thought. Lukács' reluctance to throw away communist ideology can be glimpsed in the way that he approaches Dickens in *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism.* This book's third chapter, "Critical Realism and Social Realism", notably demonstrates Lukács' intention to explore the potential of a less doctrinal "critical realism", which was originally Lukács' term for the nineteenth-century form of high realism that he then develops further for his own purposes.[57] In particular, he ruminates about how critical realism could help the workers to achieve the communist revolution (135). Despite its differences with the obviously directly doctrinal "socialist realism", Lukács suggests that both strains of realism could both perhaps be used as distinct yet complementary forms to try and realise a socialist society (104). Intriguingly, Lukács cites Dickens as a writer who not only obviously took on the method of critical realism (which, he argues, describes characters from the outside), but he offers him as a transitional figure who also used the methods of socialist realism (which, he claims, describes characters from within ): "Many realist writers use both methods; and both methods may coexist in the same work of art. Dickens is a case in point: his plebeian characters are explored from the inside, his upper- and middle-class characters from the outside." (93-94). Lukács' reading of the working-class characters in Dickens as indicative of the methods of socialist realism was the type of interpretation that Adorno found most contentious in his rebuttal to Lukács. Adorno chastises Lukács for what he would term just a few years later a "committed" reading of literature, or the act of reading through the prism of a narrow political "dogma" (*NTL2* 77 and *NTL1* 218). Adorno is certainly right that Lukács' projection of a specific worldview onto Dickensian realism risks acting as an example of committed literature *par excellence*, or turning "realistic" literature into something that is uncritically reflective of a

[56] Adorno claims that Lukács' earlier work more successfully applied literary solutions to the philosophical issue of reification (*NTL1* 216).
[57] Adorno recognises this, when he argues that "Lukács would like to broaden the concept of socialist realism [.]" (*NTL1* 217).

particular political message. At the very least, Adorno's criticism somewhat undercuts Lukács' earlier warnings about how one's subjective views could distort one's grasp of the objective reality of a piece of literature.

So, why then did Adorno draw upon a writer that he acknowledges to be "one of the founders of the realistic and social novel" if he criticises realistic and social realist fiction in his response to Lukács (*NTL2* 171)? His position is understandable if we consider that Adorno ends up defending his own version of a critical realism. If we return to the second potential reading of his comment that "Dickens and Balzac, are not so realistic after all", this interpretation reveals that, in practice, Adorno's appeal to Dickens in his early lecture actually unseals the hard and fast dualism between modernism and realism offered by Lukács at certain points of his career. Although "Extorted Reconciliation" is rhetorically forceful in its defence of modernism against Lukács' fetish of realism, Adorno is not necessarily dismissing Dickens or, indeed, realism. Instead of reading, like the Warwick Research Collective, the 1931 lecture on Dickens as an early work that stands out at "right angles" to the rest of his literary theory, Adorno's comments on the mechanics of critical literature in "Extorted Reconciliation" show that this earlier discussion was actually consistent with Adorno's later theory of modernist literature. Take this comment by Adorno:

> The object is taken into the subject in the form of an image rather than turning to stone in front of it like an object under the spell of the alienated world. Through the contradiction between the object that has been reconciled within an image, that is, spontaneously assimilated into the subject, and the real, unreconciled object out there in the world, the work of art criticises reality. It represents negative knowledge of reality. In analogy to a current philosophical expression, we might speak of 'aesthetic difference' from existence: only by virtue of this difference, and not by denying it, does the work of art become both work of art and correct consciousness. (*NTL1* 224-25).

We can see here the imprints of Adorno's theory of reification in this description of art's "negative knowledge of reality" in the contradiction between the conceptually mediated object (an "object that has been reconciled within an image") and the object (the "unreconciled object out there in the

world"). As we will see in the following section, Adorno embraces Dickens' realist fiction for the way that it employs allegory to resist interpretation which, dialectically, allows one to interpret the text for glimpses of non-identity that contradict the semblance of capitalist totality. In other words, we will see how Adorno offers the idea that a *genuine* critical realism could also go by another name: modernism. We will now see how these concerns of reification, realism and modernism relate to Adorno's interest in the Dickensian allegory, the literary technique that he argues constitutes the modernism of *The Old Curiosity Shop.*

**3. Introducing Adorno's Allegorical Reading of Dickens**

The younger Adorno made it clear in his lecture on Dickens that he was especially drawn to what he conceives as the allegorical aspect of Dickens' *The Old Curiosity Shop.* Adorno places allegory at the very centre of his own interpretation, arguing that: "The heroine, a child, Little Nell, […] is herself an allegorical figure through and through. 'She seemed to exist in a kind of allegory,' says the narrator [Master Humphrey] of her [.]" (*NTL2* 172). Adorno is referring to a self-conscious moment in the novel where the narrator is imagining the scene of the fair, innocent Nell sleeping alone, contrasting against the closed, dark curiosity shop and its old objects:

> [That] I am not sure I should have been so thoroughly possessed by this one subject, but for the heaps of fantastic things I have seen huddled together in the curiosity dealer's warehouse. These, crowding upon my mind, in connection with the child, and gathering round her, as it were, brought her condition palpably before me. (Dickens, *The Old* 19-20).

This scene is self-conscious not just because it refers to the moment when the narrator reads the image of Nell in bed surrounded by the objects of the dark curiosity shop as *almost* an allegory, but also in the fact that Dickens inserted this sentence during his 1841 revisions of the novel after the critic Thomas Hood argued for the allegorical meaning of this particular scene.[58] It may seem curious that Adorno would even be interested in this somewhat strained form of allegory. Hood's review had

[58] For more information on Dickens' revision of *The Old Curiosity Shop,* see Jack Tan's "Charles Dickens' Idealised Portraits: Rewriting the child in Oliver Twist and The Old Curiosity Shop" [2015] (n.p.).

suggested this image offered "an Allegory of the peace and innocence of Childhood in the midst of Violence, Superstition, and all the hateful Passions of the world. How sweet and fresh the youthful figure! ... How soothing the moral." (96). If Dickens is offering a definition of allegory in the sense of what Hood calls a "moral vehicle", the author would veer dangerously towards the crude didacticism that Adorno criticises in social realism (112). As we will see, it is not actually unusual for Adorno to take Dickens at his word, contradicting many of the positions on literature he would go on to hold. And yet, Adorno suggests instead that Dickens' allegory does something more dialectical, ambiguous and, critically, non-identical with the presentation of the image. Adorno intends to take and adapt this non-identical element further for his own specific definition of allegory.

As many critics have already established, Adorno's understanding of allegory in his interpretation of *The Old Curiosity Shop* was heavily influenced by Benjamin's theory of allegory in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* [*Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*] [1925/8].[59] Although there are various aspects of Benjamin's notion of allegory that Adorno is concerned with (as we will see later), in this particular lecture Adorno is largely focused on the enigmatic character of the Benjaminian allegory. In his work on German tragic drama, Benjamin begins by outlining the distinction certain German Romantics made between symbolism and allegory. Although Benjamin's account demonstrates that there was a diversity of definitions of both "symbol" and "allegory", he seeks to critique a particular Romantic narrative that privileged the symbol as unified, eternal and totalising over the allegory, which was rejected as fragmentary, arbitrary, conceptual or abstract (*The Origin* 159-97). In the process of dismantling this antithesis between symbol and allegory, Benjamin offers a theory that instead preaches about allegory's critical potential. For example, by describing the allegory as a "fragment, a rune", Benjamin embraces the allegory *as* fragmentary, disowning the idea that the fragment is the reserve of totality: "It is not possible to conceive of a starker opposite to the artistic symbol, the plastic symbol, the image of organic totality, than this amorphous fragment which

[59] See, for example, the critical view that Adorno uses a Benjamin-inflected concept of allegory in Michael Hollington's "Adorno, Benjamin and The Old Curiosity Shop" (87-95), Helen Small's "The Bounded Life" (261), Jeremy Tambling's *Going Astray: Dickens and London* (93), Andrew McCann's "Ruins, Refuse, and the Politics of Allegory in The Old Curiosity Shop" (171) and Sarah Winter's "The Old Curiosity Shop and Master Humphrey's Clock" (136), just to name a few.

is seen in the form of allegorical script." (176).[60] Resisting totality, Benjamin appropriates the idea that allegory is a representation or concept that is non-identical with its object or sign. He dialectically embraces this very runic quality, even arguing that allegory (and indeed any image used to signify something) necessarily points to something other than itself: "Any person, any object, any relation can mean absolutely anything." (174-75). He consequently celebrates the fracture between the image and meaning in allegory – in other words, he suggests that an object and its representation are not identical, but that an image can represent a meaning that is distinct from its own commonly associated meanings.

Adorno's distinction between the Romantic fetish of the symbol and the Benjaminian allegory is crucial to understanding why he would have been attracted to a novel that was so self-referentially allegorical.[61] For a quick illustration of Adorno's invocation of this distinction, let us turn to his discussion of the Punch puppet in Short and Codlin's travelling puppet show: "There can be no doubt about its allegorical character, given a formulation like this one: 'Punch, it may be remarked, seemed to be pointing with the tip of his cap to a most flourishing epitaph, and to be chuckling over it with all his heart.'" (Dickens, *The Old* 129 qtd. in Adorno, *NTL2* 172). Adorno initially fails to elaborate upon why this image of Punch is allegorical, leaving the reader in the dark about the puppet's so-called "allegorical character" until later on in the lecture: "The marionettes are as much, and better symbols of death, than the cemetery, whose symbolic character seems to have been arbitrarily moved to the surface of the plot." (*NTL2* 176). In other words, Adorno is arguing that Punch offers an allegory of death. Again, although Adorno does not make this clear, the quotation about Punch tipping his hat to an epitaph refers to the scene where the doll is "perched cross-legged upon a tombstone" (indeed, the illustration on the following page shows his limp body draped on the gravestone) (Dickens, *The Old* 128-29).[62] On one hand, Adorno is pointing out that the gravestone is understood to be a common symbol of death. He deems the gravestone to be uncritical and superficial because it offers an

[60] For example, see Benjamin's discussion of Goethe (*The Origin* 161).
[61] Note, however, that Benjamin did not oppose allegory and symbolism in general, as he also offers in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* an idea of how our understanding of symbolism should be revised (159-97).
[62] The translation of the novel that Adorno was reading from contained the illustrations of the original, English edition.

exhausted, conventional image that is directly associated with the concept of death in the popular imagination. Meanwhile, Punch represents to Adorno an allegory in the Benjaminian sense because its particularity is novel to him. For Adorno, Dickens offers the puppet as an uncanny simulacrum of the dead body: "Perhaps his imperturbable character was never more strikingly developed, for he preserved his usual equable smile notwithstanding that his body was dangling in a most uncomfortable position, all loose and limp and shapeless [.]" (128). Fundamentally, this allegory works for Adorno because the relation of the Punch puppet to death is not presented as an organic relation, thereby emphasising the disjuncture between a representation and the object that it represents. Of course, there is a significant vulnerability in Adorno's decision to privilege the allegory over the symbol; there is a danger that making the puppet stand in for death is just another form of identity thinking in that the allegorical method makes unlike things like in its own way.[63] In this way, Adorno's so-called distinction between allegory and symbols actually comes down to very little. Yet it is worth noting that Adorno is trying to distinguish allegorical practice from identity thinking even though both approaches are mediated by concepts. He would retort that allegorical practice is distinct from identity thinking in that it necessarily involves a kind of critical reason that makes use of the concept, but without making the artwork conceptual.[64]

Indeed, Adorno holds that the allegorical image's frustration of its meaning is critical in the sense that it provokes interpretation. For example, if we return to Adorno's investment in the allegorical reading of Nell, we can see why it piques his interest. From the first chapter, the reader is immediately faced with a narrator who is trying to interpret Little Nell's situation in the street and, later, her situation within the curiosity shop itself. When Humphrey first meets Nell in the street, he is overtaken by his inability to figure out why she is being employed in such a way:

> Her quick eye seemed to read my thoughts, for as it met mine she added that there was no harm in what she had been doing, but it was a great secret - a secret which she did not even

[63] There is the question of why the Romantics decided to choose the symbol over the allegory. In defence of the symbol, it could be argued that its refusal to represent anything *other* than itself is a more apt way of preventing the concept from determining the object.

[64] See Jürgen Habermas' critique of Adorno's appeal to reason despite his proclamations about reason's instrumentality in "The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Re-Reading Dialectic of Enlightenment" (18).

> know herself. [...] While we were thus engaged, I revolved in my mind a hundred different explanations of the riddle and rejected them every one. (Dickens, *The Old* 10).

Humphrey's pains to describe Nell's situation as a "secret" and a "riddle" betrays his drive to gain some knowledge from this cryptic scene. Yet Nell herself can give nothing away. The narrator's reading of Nell as a representation of a hidden meaning is frustrated. Crucially, Adorno interprets this block as precisely the thing that drives the reader to interpret the ambiguous picture. For instance, if we return once more to the contrasting image at the end of chapter one, Humphrey explains that it is the curious position of Nell (i.e. amongst objects that seem out of the ordinary) that grabs his attention, adding that if she were in a mere "common chamber", the image would not have arrested his mind (19-20). In turn, by betraying that Humphrey is no omniscient narrator, this interpretive block suggests that Dickens does not give a strictly committed allegory like Hood suggested. Such a denial of meaning is illustrated by Humphrey's self-conscious movement away from dictating the narrative at the end of chapter three (33). This moment is picked up and read by Adorno as the presentation of a puppet master who, being frustrated in his occupation, "then expressly withdraws", thereby showing that the meaning of the allegory of Nell is not necessarily given to the reader by the narrator (*NTL2* 172). The fact that Dickens offers this gap between the signifier and the signified (and the subsequent provocation of interpretation to work this riddle out) demonstrates that this particular understanding of the allegory anticipates and is consistent with Adorno's later formulation of modernist literature as that which exposes the non-identity between the object and the concept.

After coming against this block to his own interpretation, Adorno then suggests that he has figured out what Nell is an allegory for: a representation of *and* commentary on the injustices of the bourgeois world of capitalism. He argues that she stands in as the "victim of the mythic powers of bourgeois fate and at the same time the slender ray of light that fleetingly illuminates the bourgeois world [.]" (*NTL2* 172). On the surface, the notion that Nell represents the injustices of capitalism does not seem particularly dialectical. This reading seems fairly close to Hood's moral view that Nell represents the conditions of children in the 1840s. Indeed, Adorno acknowledges that he is drawing upon a novel so nakedly set in the British Industrial Revolution, which means that at one point in the

lecture, he offers a pedestrian, superficial interpretation of the "industrial city as the Hell space of the bourgeois world" that Nell and her grandfather find themselves in (172, 176).[65] It is here that Adorno naively takes Dickens' sentimental moralism as gospel. Adorno suggests that Nell is allegorical because she manages to offer an insight into the bourgeois world as a bad system because she simultaneously points to a system *outside* of capitalism. This interpretation is indicated by Adorno's designation of Nell as a "slender ray of light" (172). This description of the allegory of Nell not only suggests that she literally enlightens her readers by allowing us to recognise the bourgeois world as a kind of hell (in other words, offering an image of capitalism that covers its object adequately), but that Nell is a kind of heavenly allegorical figure, offering the reader salvation by briefly shedding light onto a qualitatively different system. To unpack this stance, let us turn to how Adorno suggests that Nell is the critical ray of light that both represents capitalism and offers a way out of bourgeois society.

**4. Flirting with the Escape**

Adorno spends most of his lecture on Dickens flirting with the idea that *The Old Curiosity Shop* may offer an escape from capitalist society, a transition that would betray the non-identity between capitalism and a markedly different (read: better) society. Adorno argues that, despite its setting in the British Industrial Revolution, the novel is *not* a bourgeois piece of literature. He contends that Dickens' reflections on his contemporary society are facilitated by an earlier way of thinking that is distinct from bourgeois identity-thinking:

> For Dickens' fictional work, in which poverty, despair, and death have already been recognized as the fruits of a bourgeois world, a world to which only the traces of human warmth and kindness in individual human relationships can reconcile one - this work also contains the outlines of a completely different sort of view of the world. You may call it prebourgeois; in it the individual has not yet reached full autonomy, nor, therefore, complete isolation, but instead is presented as a bearer of objective factors, of a dark, obscure fate and a

[65] Specifically, Dickens' novel is set in the decade which is often referred to as the Hungry Forties.

> starlike consolation that overtake the individual and permeate his life but never follow from the law of the individual, as do, for instance, the fates of the characters in Flaubert's novels. (*NTL2* 171).

Adorno is arguing that Dickens' realism refuses to take a contemporaneous bourgeois ideology at its word.[66] As he continues: Dickens' work does not "[take] its own criterion the highest norm of bourgeois art, the individual and his psychology, thereby helping to reveal the objective structure of a life space which tries of its own accord to dissolve all objectivity in subjectivity. The prebourgeois form of Dickens' novels becomes a means of dissolving the very bourgeois world they depict." (172). Firstly, Adorno holds that Dickens' method distances itself from identity thinking to expose the true state of the capitalist "life space" as something that makes a mockery of its claims to objectivity. Adorno characterises capitalism as a particular system (object) that falsely presents itself as objective and necessary (concept). Adorno's view that Dickens' text occupies a self-conscious, negative position is further enlightened by his decision to describe it as "prebourgeois".[67] Adorno uses this term to suggest that Dickens' characters are ultimately determined by a "dark, obscure fate". What Adorno means by the term "fate" in the essay is vague, complicated by the fact that he also asserts that Nell is determined by a mythic "bourgeois fate" (172). However, Adorno's distinction between a pre-bourgeois fate and a bourgeois fate correlates with his nostalgia for a highly romanticised, pre-capitalist world (but more on this below). Likewise, he suggests that Dickens' characters have a residual, pre-capitalist quality that distinguishes them from the psychologically aware and autonomous individuals found in high realist texts. Adorno's subsequent reading of Dickens' characters as standing in for "objective factors" suggests that, instead of characters that dictate the

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[66] What is striking is that Adorno seems to be deferring to the kind of nostalgic discourse of "Merry England" and "Young England" that Friedrich Engels discussed in a footnote in *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*: "The hope of "Young England" is a restoration of the old "Merry England" with its brilliant features and its romantic feudalism. This object is of course unattainable and ridiculous, a satire upon all historic development; but the good intention, the courage to resist the existing state of things and prevalent prejudices, and to recognise the vileness of our present condition, is worth something anyhow. Wholly isolated is the half-German Englishman, Thomas Carlyle, who, originally a Tory, goes beyond all those hitherto mentioned. He has sounded the social disorder more deeply than any other English bourgeois, and demands the organisation of labour." (294).

[67] See also Adorno's description of Dickens' work as "baroque", an allusion Benjamin's study of baroque tragic drama from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (*NTL2* 171).

message of the novel through their own limited subjectivity (as what he calls, ironically, "free representations of human beings"), Dickens' characters offer themselves as allegories that genuinely reflect social reality (as "illustrations of objective meanings by means of human figures") (172). In turn, the term "prebourgeois" suggests that the novel can offer a way of thinking that is not just distinct from the bourgeois identitarian thinking in the sense that it is aware of its flaws, but that through this awareness, the novel can subsequently redeem the world by self-consciously grasping towards a markedly different one – namely, a world that encourages the human warmth and kindness that Adorno claims capitalism lacks.

Adorno then tests the waters by suggesting that Nell's various escapes potentially act as allegories for what he terms a "transition" from bourgeois society to a different one (*NTL2* 177). Initially, Adorno is taken by the "motif of escape" that appears throughout *The Old Curiosity Shop*, even seriously considering whether flight is an act of redemption (174). The redemptive power of escape is suggested in specific moments of the text - for example, when trying to prevent her grandfather from stealing Mrs Jarley's money, Nell stresses the importance of immediately escaping from the unnamed town that they have been occupying: "'Nothing but flight can save us. Up!'" (Dickens, *The Old* 323). Nell certainly interprets the flight as an act of redemption; in this particular instance, the movement of the word "up" and the alternative denotation of "flight" as *flying* in the air gives Nell's instruction a kind of foreboding tone of religious salvation (indeed, the text's reference to flight anticipates Nell's ascent to heaven [554]). The novel makes it explicit that Nell reflects upon this moment in the following chapter as a moral act of saving her grandfather from "disgrace and crime" (32). Yet more generally, Nell's various escapes entail her physical transition from cities and towns into the countryside, hinting at a more secular sense of salvation. Adorno picks up on her nature-worship, suggesting that her flight from city to country sees her finding redemption in the story's "somewhat romantic" scenes of nature (*NTL2* 175).[68] This analysis suggests that the natural setting inspires a spiritual, mystical sense of awe. However, Adorno argues that these moments should not promote in us a pantheistic love of nature, but should instead provoke us to consider what this

[68] Adorno appears to be picking up on the tension between country and city that is also present in other Dickensian novels such as *David Copperfield* and *Oliver Twist.*

natural world stands in for and what it stands in opposition to. He highlights the moment when Nell and her grandfather observe London from their natural surroundings, directing his audience's attention to how the narrative consciously opposes the beauty of the natural world against the infernal city (175-77). Again, Adorno curiously offers a naïve reading of Dickens' novel – in this case, he presents a flimsy distinction between the countryside and city as an allegorical contrast between heaven and hell. Rather romantically, at this point he reads the countryside as a representation of a possible transition from capitalism to a situation outside of industrial society.

Just as Adorno reads Nell as this specific allegory, he also reads Quilp as an allegory for the predatory capitalism that she is escaping from:

> Quilp, whom Dickens calls a dwarf and who is attached to Nell through a desire whose horror is all the more palpable the more Dickens is concerned to conceal it, is no more human than Nell. But he is not, as the style of the woodcut depicting him might lead one to believe, a devil, but rather a kobold, and as kobold also the figure of the bourgeois greedy for profit. Only Daumier has depicted the bourgeois spirit world as incisively as this […] The flight is a flight from Quilp [.] (*NTL2* 173-74).

Adorno argues that Dickens uses an ambiguous image of the "dwarf" to reflect the social reality of the so-called "bourgeois spirit world". Dickens' introduction of Quilp as a "dwarf" proves ambiguous because it could simultaneously be a dehumanising description of a man's actual stature or an indication that Quilp is non-human (*The Old* 27).[69] Adorno follows this ambivalent line when he takes from the mystical aspect of the Benjaminian's study of the Baroque to present Quilp as a "kobold", a dwarf found in Germanic folklore. Rather than supposing that Adorno is arguing that Quilp is to be interpreted as actually magical, this mystical description is a tool that reflects the uncomfortable truth of predatory capitalism. Alongside his sexually predatory behaviour towards Nell that Adorno claims Dickens deliberately suppresses, Quilp's vampiric extraction of value from his renters and commodities from the curiosity shop presents his drive to constantly pursue, exercise power over, and

[69] Adorno's discussion of the dwarf here may also be mediated by conventional interpretations of Alberich in Wagner's *The Ring*.

get even with his victims (Adorno, *NTL2* 173-74; Dickens, *The Old* 90, 152).[70] If Quilp is meant to be read as an allegory for capitalism, he most convincingly represents what Adorno deems its totalising character. Adorno's reference to "Chapter 49" (when Quilp – presumed dead – surprises his wife, her mother and Brass) picks up on Quilp's mystical ability to appear to his victims anywhere and everywhere (Dickens, *The Old* 371). This supernatural power might be understood as representing what Adorno saw as capitalist society's aim at obscuring and negating anything non-identical with itself (*NTL2* 174). Quilp's imposition is emphasised in a scene Adorno does not cite, after Nell comes across Quilp in the dark in the town where she is exhibiting waxworks: "[she] felt as if she were hemmed in by a legion of Quilps, and the very air itself were filled with them." (Dickens, *The Old* 212). In short, Quilp is like capitalism in that both aim to smother their victims by overcoming anything that tries to elude their reach.

To some extent, Adorno's interpretation here has reason to read Nell as someone who fleetingly reaches beyond the bourgeois world's reification. Adorno hints at this hope when he comments that: "Quilp [is a figure] who pursues but cannot overtake [Nell and her grandfather], because the course of his demonism is as firmly prescribed as that of Nell's sacrifice" (*NTL2* 174). Although Adorno is emphasising that both Quilp and Nell are determined by fate (he does not make it clear if this is the pre-bourgeois or bourgeois fate at play, but it is clear here that he is talking about something bigger than the characters' individual agency), he also reveals that he is entertaining the possibility that one could escape or, at least, overtake the bind of bourgeois society. For example, when discussing their initial flight from Quilp in "Chapter 12", Nell declares:

> 'Let us be beggars,' said the child passing an arm round his neck. 'I have no fear but we shall have enough, I am sure we shall. Let us walk through country places, and sleep in fields and under trees, and never think of money again, or anything that can make you sad, but rest at nights and have the sun and wind upon our faces in the day, and thank God together. Let us

[70] Adorno mentions the scene when Quilp kisses Nell on the cheek in his lecture (Adorno, *NTL2* 173-74; Dickens, *The Old* 72). In the fourth chapter of his novel, Dickens mentions that one of Quilp's various occupations is being a landlord: "He collected the rents of whole colonies of filthy streets and alleys by the waterside [.]" (*The Old* 90). In the twelfth chapter, Quilp takes over the shop and sells all its "things" after Nell's grandfather gambles away Quilp's investment (152).

> never set foot in dark rooms or melancholy houses any more, but wander up and down wherever we like to go, and when you are tired, you shall stop to rest in the pleasantest place that we can find, and I will go and beg for both.' (Dickens, *The Old* 79).

Just as she is happy to throw away her means of making money at Jarley's waxworks to redeem her grandfather, her statement "let us never think of money again" shows that even from the offset, from her very first plan to escape, Nell desires to reject the money form. If we briefly return to Adorno's own theory of reification, we can remember that it holds fast onto Marx's idea that exchange value is expressed in the money form. Considering that exchange value is what allows two qualitatively different objects to be exchanged as if they were identical, Nell is rejecting the object (i.e. money) that allows the dissolution of different objects' particularity and, subsequently, their non-identity with one another. In this light, Nell's escape to the countryside is presented as a fleeting moment of negating the capitalist world. For instance, her romantic formulation that she and her grandfather will be "happy beggars" dialectically reverses the negative connotations of begging. She indicates that living outside of the monetary system would be a happy state, that moving beyond industrial capitalism would be a passage to utopia. If Nell does indeed find this "pleasantest place" in her escape, Adorno suggests that it is found in a fleeting moment of contemplating the sublimity of nature - for example, when Nell looks up at the "bright stars […] eternal in their numbers as in their changeless and incorruptible existence" (Dickens, *The Old* 322 qtd. in Adorno, *NTL2* 177). For Adorno, Nell embraces a utopian view of asceticism at this point, something which is evident when she contemplates her escape: "She had no thought of hunger, or cold, or thirst, or suffering." (Dickens, *The Old* 154). In Adorno's eyes, this moment is utopian because, when she first escapes, she fleetingly occupies a place in the world that is not predicated on alienated commodity exchange.

However, just as Nell realises that she cannot live without food or money, Adorno soon makes it clear that the escape from capitalism is not as simple as running away. As he moves further through the lecture, he develops his analysis of Nell's escape by suggesting that the horrible truth of capitalism is only glimpsed through her death rather than through her escapes to the countryside: "The novel is nothing but the story of her sacrifice." (*NTL2* 173). Tellingly, Adorno's description of Nell's

role as a "sacrifice" rewrites the exact function of the allegory of the escape: "[the] flight contains a deep dialectical ambiguity. First, it is the escape of the group from the bourgeois world that has sworn a demonic opposition to it, an escape that succeeds at the price of death." (173-74).[71] Considering Adorno's position as a materialist philosopher, it is perhaps not surprising that he would suddenly abandon his previous line of thought about how exactly Nell operates as an allegory. Adorno's dialectical materialism entails that one cannot merely escape from capitalism in a totalising, capitalist world, least of all through one's escape into nature. Adorno makes his opposition to the critical potential of Nell's "Romantic nature-worship" clear in a snipe at the end of his lecture, a position that is understandable not only because a certain strain of Romanticism offered an idealist philosophy at odds with Adorno's own, but also because the idea of the totality of nature accorded with the symbolism that he and Benjamin were trying to dismantle (177). Instead, his suggestion that the allegory of the escape necessarily entails that Nell must die intimates that, perhaps in her current situation, the only practical line of escape from a bad reality is through death.

Adorno clarifies that the redemption glimpsed in the girl's sacrifice is not for Nell herself but for the reader. As Adorno puts it: "The crisis of this industrial world - identified by Dickens as unemployment - becomes a decision about Nell's life: she dies as the victim of the mythical complex in which she stands, and in expiation for an injustice that is taking place there [.]" (*NTL2* 176). Adorno's attention to the plotline of how the "innocent" has to die to atone for her grandfather's "senseless passion for gambling" puts the lens on the problematic view of familial "guilt" that passes onto the angelic child (a theme in nineteenth-century realist literature and plays that Adorno was particularly interested in) (173).[72] Yet Adorno is emphatic that the scene of the bourgeois family's sins is also an allegory for the culpability of bourgeois society for inflicting violence on its victims.[73]

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[71] The concept of sacrifice itself is associated with identitarian thinking (and the concept of exchange) in *Dialectic of Enlightenment.*

[72] As Adorno puts it: "Nell and her grandfather are bound to one another by the force of a fate that burdens the granddaughter with the grandfather's guilt, his blind and senseless passion for gambling, in a natural linkage, a fate that leads to the death of Nell, herself innocent, as a propitiatory sacrifice." (*NTL2* 173).

[73] This reading anticipates an incredibly similar reading in Adorno's lecture on Henrik Ibsen's play *The Wild Duck* in the later work *Problems of Moral Philosophy* [1967]. Adorno interprets Ibsen's young female character, Hedvig, as the innocent figure who has to be sacrificed to atone for the sins of her bourgeois family (*Problems* 158).

By using Nell as a sacrificial lamb, Adorno seems to suggest that Dickens actually allows his readers to glimpse into a breach, a glimpse of non-identity, in capitalist society. Although Adorno is still reinforcing a rather conventional, Dickensian reading of Nell as an antidote to capitalist society here, his idea that the critical potential of Nell's sacrifice comes in the form of a mere glimpse resembles his later descriptions of Anglophone modernist writers (see the next chapter on his thoughts on the fragmentary potential of Joyce's *Ulysses*). Throughout the lecture, Adorno describes the allegory of Nell in the same manner as he describes her at one point as a "slender ray of light" (172). Firstly, this slender ray represents a kind of fragment that negates the semblance of capitalist society. As Adorno would later consistently do with the image of women, he offers the reading of the violence practised on women as a reserve of knowledge, a breach that highlights the discrepancy between the concept of capitalist society (how it presents itself), and its object (its actual terrible state). Secondly, the notion of a "ray of light" also exploits the more hopeful connotation of Nell's death; although Adorno states that Nell "loses hope" at the time of her death, on the following page he still maintains that "she represents hope" (176-77). Adorno is progressing the view that once this non-identity is viewed and acknowledged, then this breach would represent a sense of hope in the fact that it presents its non-identity, its negation of the bourgeois world's false totality. This glimpse of hope in Nell's death is for Adorno a sign that another world is possible: a post-bourgeois world. Whilst it seems that Adorno's analysis could easily end here, he makes a surprising turn at the very end of his lecture. Therefore, it is imperative to examine how he takes his reading of *The Old Curiosity Shop's* critical, modernist quality in a sudden, new direction.

**5. The Object World**

To reflect the surprising shift at the end of Adorno's lecture, this chapter will end with a diversion. Whilst the majority of Adorno's lecture is focused on the allegory of Nell, Adorno's discussion of the image of money at the talk's close has two different theoretical ramifications for the status of the object in Adorno's formulation of the Dickensian allegory. Adorno finishes his talk by transitioning from the allegory of the young woman to the apparent allegory of the coins given to Nell and her grandfather in chapter forty-four:

> Because [Nell] is not able to take hold of the object-world of the bourgeois sphere, the object-world seizes hold of her, and she is sacrificed. But Dickens recognized that the possibility of transition and dialectical rescue was inherent in this object-world, this lost, rejected world, and he expressed it, better than Romantic nature-worship was ever able to do, in the powerful allegory of money with which the depiction of the industrial city ends: 'two old, battered, smoke-encrusted penny pieces. Who knows but they shone as brightly in the eyes of angels as golden gifts that have been chronicled on tombs?' [Dickens, *The Old* 344-45]. (Adorno, *NTL2* 177).

Whilst Adorno explicitly connects this image of the pennies with Nell's relation to the object world through this transition, he does not elaborate on how exactly the "allegory of money" is the especially redemptive point of the novel. This ending is somewhat abrupt and comes close to being a non-sequitur. Adorno's invocation of this allegedly powerful and redemptive allegory in the novel demands to be unravelled to demonstrate the nuance of Adorno's use of *The Old Curiosity Shop* for his theory of critical literature. This allegory of the coins simultaneously surprises by more forcefully pushing the preponderance of the object in Adorno's critical literary project whilst also complicating that very preponderance.

The first curious ramification of Adorno's suggestion that the penny pieces are the novel's especially redemptive allegory is that this claim privileges the object in his interpretation. Scholars such as Michael Hollington ("The Voice" 1-8), John Bowen (18-19), Esther Leslie (n.p.) and Andrew McCann (170-94) have made a strong case that Adorno offers an object-orientated reading of Dickens – with "object-orientated" not only meaning the emphasis of the object over the concepts that attempt to cover it, but also privileging the role of inanimate commodities such as the remnants of nineteenth-century Parisian arcades and wax museums. Specifically, these scholars hold that Adorno's object-orientated theory of allegory resembles Benjamin's presentation of allegory. Just as Benjamin promoted the runic ruin as the allegory *par excellence* in his *Habilitation* thesis, his later work *The Arcades Project* embraced the allegorical potential of the outdated objects of modernity past. For example, in the section entitled "The Collector", Benjamin offers a dialectical theory of the figures of

the collector and allegorist that proposes how objects could be arranged to make meaning in capitalist society. First, Benjamin describes the section's eponymous figure of "the collector", who collects discarded miscellaneous objects and arranges them into an assemblage (*The Arcades* 211). In his preparatory papers for this work, Benjamin had explained that whilst the collector appreciates his objects by researching their past, he also "divest[s] things of their commodity character by taking possession of them [and] bestows on them only connoisseur value, rather than use value" so that he can also grasp towards a "better" future where "things are freed from the drudgery of being useful" (19). Second, Benjamin offers "the allegorist" who takes up the project of allegory already outlined in his *Habilitation* thesis, a figure who "dislodges things from their context and, from the outset, relies on his profundity to illuminate their meaning." (211) Whilst Benjamin initially presents these figures as polar opposites, with the collector's general impetus towards collection and the allegorist's impetus toward dislocation, he then immediately elaborates that "in every collector hides an allegorist, and in every allegorist a collector." (211). This dialectical relation of the two figures suggest that the approaches of the allegorist and collector are actually two poles of the kind of approach that could elucidate meaning from the petrified objects of capitalism. Both figures dislocate objects from their use and exchange values in capitalism, attempt to draw new meanings from their objects, and see their work as an ongoing, unfinished "patchwork" (211). *The Arcades Project* gestures towards the detritus of recent modernity as points of resistance, simultaneously reading capitalism's imprints on its rubbish whilst weaponising the fact that this rubbish is no longer of use to capitalism. Benjamin suggests that these husks of objects can be used to draw upon other, new meanings beyond those imposed upon these objects by capitalism – whether through fragmentation, montage, or a combination of the two.

Up to a point, Adorno's reading of the allegory of the money is influenced by Benjamin. If we closely examine Adorno's comments on the penny pieces, the fact that he situates these coins within an "object-world, this lost, rejected world" suggests that he is explicitly reading the objects of the novel through Benjamin's idea of the broken object-world. We can see the results of Adorno and Benjamin's conversations about Dickens if we turn to Benjamin's quotation of Adorno's lecture on Dickens in *The Arcades Project*. In "The Collector" section, Benjamin significantly places the

fragment alongside the passage from chapter one of *The Old Curiosity Shop* where Nell is described as someone who "seemed to exist in a kind of allegory" (*The Arcades* 208).[74] Indeed, if we return to the novel, we can see that Dickens' description of the money as "two old, battered, smoke-encrusted penny pieces" might be fruitfully read in light of the allegorical mode outlined in "The Collector". In the context of Nell's poverty, the coins could arguably have some utility under capitalism. The simile that suggests the money arrives "as gold gifts" implies it has exchange value if the money was traded for food. But scholars such as Hollington suggest that this allegory can be read in a more redemptive light ("The Voice" 8). There is cause to read these coins just as we read Nell's rejection of money when she leaves her job at the waxworks. Just as Nell looks beyond her own material situation, Adorno does admittedly find hope in the allegory of money where it turns the coins into an obsolete husk. In this decrepit description of the pennies (Dickens' adjective of "old" implies that these coins are outdated), the literal money form is once again shown to be something of a ruined, dead object that cannot be exchanged for a qualitatively different object. In this way, by stripping away what Benjamin calls the object's "functional relations", the removal of the use value and exchange value from the pennies not only points to a way of relating to objects beyond the context foisted upon them by capitalism, but also suggests that a system beyond capitalism can be glimpsed through these objects (*The Arcades* 20).

One of the consequences of this more forceful turn to the object is that Adorno's lecture appears to advocate shifting the site of redemption in the novel from the human subject to inanimate objects. For instance, take his statement about why Nell has to die: "Nell's death is decided in the sentence that reads: 'There were some trifles there - poor useless things - that she would have liked to take away, but that was impossible' [Dickens, *Der Raritätenladen* 99 and *The Old* 154-55]. Because she is not able to take hold of the object-world of the bourgeois sphere, the object-world seizes hold of her, and she is sacrificed." (Adorno, *NTL2* 177). Whilst this could be read as merely outlining the fact that Nell was unable to resist the self-annihilation that comes with instrumental reason (namely, the objectification of the individual), Adorno's qualification following this sentence – "But Dickens

[74] Note that Benjamin was also quoting from the German translation of the novel published by Insel (Dickens, *Der Raritätenladen* 18-19).

recognized that the possibility of transition and dialectical rescue was inherent in this object-world" - indicates that he is charging Nell with a fatal failure to understand the critical potential of capitalism's dead objects (177). The end of the lecture, with its location of the "dialectical rescue" in the allegory of the pennies and not in Nell, would help to explain Adorno's conclusion that Nell's death is for the reader's redemption and not for her own. This ending seems to suggest that Adorno is dispensing with a philosophy that centres on the human subject lest that subject uses concepts to master the object. He considers instead how an object-oriented philosophy of dead objects might furnish his idea of allegory.[75] Or, at the very least, Adorno seems to be dispensing with the living human subject as a figure of redemption. His use of Nell's death for an allegory hints at his interest in the critical potential of the dead, inanimate bodies of humans, or anthropomorphic objects. In his famous essay on Beckett "Trying to Understand Endgame", Adorno revealingly notes how, in the "mere stumps of names" of the play, "[only] the name of the old mother, Nell, is somewhat familiar, if obsolete; Dickens uses it for the touching figure of the child in *The Old Curiosity Shop.*" (*NTL1* 266). Just as the Nell of Beckett's *Endgame* is a dehumanised stump of a woman, this notion of the obsolescence of Nell's name belies Adorno's critical interest in dead, human-like objects (see "Chapter 3" on Beckett). Adorno's interpretation of *The Old Curiosity Shop* takes the marionettes of the Punch and Judy Show, the waxworks and the dead bodies of children as some of the more productive motifs of the novel for his theory of allegory (*NTL2* 172, 176-77).[76]

However, this specific Benjaminian object-orientated reading of Adorno's allegory of money is misleading where it downplays the role of theorisation in Adornian allegory. The very fact that Adorno draws upon Dickens' motif for his allegory still necessitates the role of the interpreter who makes meaning from the allegory. When critics have stressed the influence that Benjamin's theory of objects had on Adorno's reading of Dickens, this often comes dangerously close to suggesting that their approaches to Dickensian allegory were one and the same. Adorno was an equally harsh critic of

[75] See, for example, Adorno and Horkheimer's discussion of the individual's mastery of nature in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (39).
[76] Note that Adorno is not just drawing upon the death of Nell, but also quotes the moment in the novel when, upon trying to beg for food, a man in the city points to the body of a dead child (Dickens, *The Old* 47 qtd. in Adorno *NTL2* 176).

his friend's work on objects in the drafts that would form *The Arcades Project.* For instance, take one of Adorno's famous criticisms of Benjamin's draft of "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire" in a letter from 10 November 1938:

> To express this another way: the theological motif of calling things by their names tends to switch into the wide-eyed presentation of mere facts. If one wanted to put it rather drastically, one could say your study is located at the crossroads of magic and positivism. This spot is bewitched. Only theory could break this spell – your own resolute and salutarily speculative theory. (*The Complete* 283).

Here, Adorno is elucidating an uneasiness he had with Benjamin's methodology and analytical approach. Adorno's comment that "only theory could break this spell" indicates that he accused Benjamin's approach of not theorising enough. Of course, this is not to say that Benjamin's approach to allegory was wholly focused on the object to the detriment of the subject. Benjamin's theory of the collector and allegorist emphasises the role of the person who collects the objects and arranges them to find a specific, new meaning. However, Benjamin's approach to his objects was distinct from Adorno's. *The Arcades Project* often leaves its objects free from the hand of theory. The text itself embodies this approach; Benjamin's work consists of fragments cut from other texts alongside snippets of Benjamin's own writings, dispersed and arranged like an assemblage the collector would make of his own prized possessions, with little to no theoretical analysis to determine these pieces. Adorno argued that, whilst he obviously advocated for a material philosophy, he could not advocate for an approach that merely centres on "material", from the *flâneur* to the arcades, without elaborating upon it with theory (281). By merely displaying the objects in an assemblage without subjecting them to criticism in practice, Adorno judges this approach to be a vulgar interpretation of the materialist method. He is accusing Benjamin of the uncritical realism of presenting objects alone as "mere facts" which, in Adorno's eyes, makes a fetish of things rather than getting to their truth content through a genuinely dialectical analysis of the thing.

Adorno's strange end to his lecture also has a second curious ramification. Adorno's analysis of the coins also problematises the preponderance of the object in his theory. Adorno is not quite

ready to give up on the role of the subject when trying to unseal the object from its concepts. The lecture betrays that it draws upon Dickens' novel both as a crypt as well as a cipher which is *cryptic.*[77] To see this duality, note Adorno's comment near the start of the lecture: "But in the ninety years that have passed since Dickens' *The Old Curiosity Shop* appeared, inserted into another novel, some of the secrets embedded in the work, perhaps without the author knowing clearly that he was doing so, have become discernible." (*NTL2* 171). On the first point, Adorno's comment that the novel is "inserted into another novel" attests to the reading of *The Old Curiosity Shop* as a crypt. In addition to referring to the fact that this work was originally published within *Master Humphrey's Clock,* this comment anticipates an admittedly Benjaminian interpretation of the novel. Benjamin would later write to Adorno in 1937 to say that he was reading a French translation of G.K. Chesterton's work *Dickens* and, amongst many things, was greatly invested in Chesterton's interpretation of *The Old Curiosity Shop* as the "key" that unlocks all of Dickens' works (indeed, Benjamin quotes this passage in *The Arcades Project*) (Benjamin, *The Complete* 178; Chesterton 82-83 qtd. in Benjamin, *The Arcades* 57).[78] Owing to the fact that this was a later development, Adorno does not mention Chesterton in his 1931 lecture, but he did view Dickens' book as an object that held some esoteric knowledge within its very interior. This point also relates to the second – that the crypt of a novel is cryptic. Crucially, before Benjamin wrote to Adorno about reading the novel, Adorno wrote to Kracauer on 27 September 1930 to comment that it was "a book of the very first rank - full of mysteries compared with which the Blochian kind reveal themselves as the toilet stench of eternity which they are". (*Briefwechsel* 250-51).[79] Adorno betrays once again his inability to give up on the imperative to think as a subject and thereby unlock the truth content of the object, seeing the "secrets" of the novel as

[77] One of the most extensive interpretations of Adorno's reading of the Dickensian allegory as a kind of cryptic crypt is John Bowen's chapter "Spirit and the Allegorical Child: Little Nell's Mortal Aesthetic" [2000], although it draws more upon Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" [1917] and the work of post-Freudians such as Torok and Abraham for its theoretical framework. It is important to note that Adorno would have been directly familiar with Benjamin's notions of mourning, melancholia and the cryptic mentioned in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (a text which does not mention Freud by name and that offered definitions of mourning and melancholia that were distinct from Freud's psychoanalytic framework).

[78] See the following comment by G. K. Chesterton in *Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens* [1911]: "I mean that the ordinary reader can remember one great thing about Master Humphrey's Clock, besides the fact that it was the frame-work of *The Old Curiosity Shop*." (231).

[79] Please note that this is an English translation of the German as it is presented in an editor's footnote in Adorno's *The Complete Correspondence, 1928-1940* (8).

something that is not determined by Dickens, but is a rebus for the theorist to find and draw upon for his own uses. Of course, this move jars against his earlier attempt to occlude the subject. And yet these strange diversions nevertheless confirm the following: that Adorno's use of Dickens' novel as an allegory suggests that he defines the text's critical quality as the way in which its very status as a dead object allows the reader to make an interpretation in an act of resisting the identity thinking of capitalism.

# Chapter 2 - Adorno and Joyce: Reading Indirectly

In an unpublished letter dated 19 September 1968, Adorno wrote to his lover Arlette Pielmann with the following statement:

> Thanks for the letter. I will happily answer your literary questions as best I can under the time pressure. From Joyce, it is advisable to read *Ulysses*. *Finnegan* is impossible in translation, and extremely difficult to penetrate even in the original. And the early stuff gives an inadequate idea of the actual conception. But *Ulysses* can be read, as bad as the translation is. And it is a key work as good as Proust. (TWAA 832/4).[80]

Pielmann's letter to Adorno is not in Adorno's archive, so it is not clear exactly what "literary question" she had asked. However, Adorno's reply suggests that she had asked for recommendations of texts by famous modernist writers. This excerpt is one of the most illuminating passages that Adorno made about Joyce. In Adorno's published work, it is difficult to find detailed information on Adorno as a *reader* of Joyce. His references to *Ulysses, Finnegans Wake* and *Work in Progress* ("the early stuff") in this letter, as well as his assessment of the poor quality of their respective translations (presumably in German), offer an explicit opinion on the experience of reading Joyce's writing. At the very least, this passage emphasises Adorno's esteem for Joyce; considering that Proust was one of the most important modernist writers to Adorno, the description of *Ulysses* as a key work ["*Schlüsselwerk*"] is high praise indeed. And yet, the extent of Adorno's intellectual interest in Joyce as it is presented here is not well-known and has not yet been properly demarcated by the scholarship. As a consequence, in this chapter I will outline the actual shape of Adorno's appreciation of Joyce. I will demonstrate that there is a tension between the import that Adorno assigns to Joyce and the lack of a detailed engagement with the content of Joyce's novels themselves. As a result, my analysis calls for a more subtle theory of Adorno's reception of the writer. Broadly, I will argue that Adorno

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[80] "*Dank für den Brief. Gern antworte ich Dir, so gut es unter dem Zeitdruck geht, auf Deine literarischen Fragen. Von Joyce empfiehlt es sich, den Ulysses zu lesen. Finnigan ist unmöglich in einer Übersetzung, und selbst im Original äußerst schwer durchdringlich. Und die frühen Sachen geben vom Eigentlichen der Konzeption eine unzulängliche Vorstellung. Aber den Ulysses kann man schon lesen, so schlecht auch die Übersetzung ist. Und est ist doch ein Schlüsselwerk so gut wie der Proust*." (Adorno, TWAA 832/4).

performs a largely *indirect* reading of Joyce that expands our understanding of how Adorno 'read' Anglophone modernist literature. It is a type of reading that focuses on aspects of Joyce's form and techniques – in particular interior monologue and language - whilst excluding much of his textual content, reflecting a creative but tendentious reading. Indeed, Adorno goes well beyond Joyce in order to maintain what he saw as the autonomous, expressionist aesthetic that better captured the fragmented experience of society after World War Two.

Adorno's interest in Joyce is also indicated by the books that he owned (although these books evoke how mediated this interest was).[81] What remains of Adorno's personal library in Frankfurt holds several books by (and related to) Joyce. Adorno's library contains German translations of the second half of *Ulysses* [1933], *Stephen Hero* (the German title is *Stephen Daedalus*) [1958], and *Giacomo Joyce* [1968], as well as an American edition of *Finnegans Wake* [1939].[82] The library also has three books of secondary works on Joyce: an English copy of Joseph Campbell and Henry Morton Robinson's *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake* [1944] and German translations of Stanislaus Joyce's works *My Brother's Keeper* [*Meines Bruders Hüter*] [1960] and *Dublin Diary* [*Das Dubliner Tagebuch des Stanislaus Joyce*] [1964].[83]

Adorno was also familiar with certain academic discussions of Joyce. For example, amongst his archival papers we can see that Adorno had marked at least three manuscripts that discussed James Joyce. The first two manuscripts are essays from 1961 by a Bristol University student called Hans-Jürgen Schüring. The first essay is entitled "A Critical Meditation about Synoptic Views on British and German Philosophy in Modern Times", whilst the second is entitled "[The] Origin of the Understanding of Truth in Poetry and Philosophy". The second essay contains a discussion that relates Joyce's technique of interior monologue to philosophy – a reading that, as we will soon see, Adorno also makes in his own reading of Joyce's work. The third manuscript was dated 1963 and was

[81] It is important to note that the library is incomplete and that it does not feature every work Adorno would have owned (or, indeed, read) over the course of his life.
[82] It is intriguing that Adorno's existing library only has the second volume of the German translation of *Ulysses.* It is difficult to judge whether Adorno also owned the first volume of the book at some point in his life.
[83] Adorno's copy of the second volume of *Ulysses* was published in Hamburg by Odyssey Press in 1933, *Stephen Daedalus* was published in Pfullingen by Neske Verlag in 1958, and his copy of *Giacomo Joyce* was published in Frankfurt by Suhrkamp Verlag in 1968. The copy of *Finnegans Wake* was published in New York by Viking Press in 1939.

probably by someone with the surname Schneider, although it is not clear exactly who the author is. Entitled "Das Detektorische des Romans" ["The Detective of Novels"], this academic essay quotes Bloch's work on detective novels – a literary genre of which Adorno was surprisingly fond (see my final chapter on Huxley). Some of the writers that Schneider reads alongside the figure of the literary detective include Joyce, Thomas Mann, Gertrude Stein and Alain Robbe-Grillet.

On the whole, scholars tend to be more familiar with Adorno's published comments on Joyce rather than his unpublished ones. Joyce's importance for Adorno is not immediately discernible from his published writings. None of Adorno's essays are explicitly about Joyce in the way that, say, Adorno's essay "Trying to Understand Endgame" is explicitly a piece about Beckett. Adorno did not include Joyce or the name of Joyce's novel in the title of any of his published essays. In the secondary criticism on Adorno and literature, Joyce will sometimes be listed amongst the group of writers that Adorno wrote about, but he is not discussed as extensively as Beckett or Proust. The awareness of Joyce's presence in Adorno's theory tends to be largely limited to Joyce's role in the famous dispute between Lukács and Adorno (addressed in the previous chapter). As a consequence, even though Joyce has featured in various accounts of this clash between the two Marxist critics, he is often relegated to a background character.

There are at least three essays by Adorno that could be said to be about Joyce – including the one that responds to Lukács. These essays are "The Position of the Narrator in the Contemporary Novel" ["Standort des Erzählers im modernen Roman"] [1954], "Extorted Reconciliation: On Georg Lukács' Realism in Our Time" ["Erpreßte Versöhnung: Zu Georg Lukács' 'Wider den mißverstandenen Realismus'"] [1958] and "Presuppositions: On the Occasion of a Reading by Hans G. Helms" ["Voraussetzungen: Aus Anlaß einer Lesung von Hans G. Helms"] [1961]. As we will see, the first two use Joyce's status as a modernist writer to oppose Lukács' preference for a certain kind of literary realism. "Presuppositions" is a slightly overlooked (though not unknown) essay which compares Joyce's technique and language in *Finnegans Wake* to that of Hans G. Helms in the speech-music poem entitled *Fa:m' Ahniesgwow* [1959]. In addition to these more extensive discussions, Adorno also references Joyce in at least the following works: *Philosophy of Modern Music* [1949] (132), *Prisms* [1951] (127), "Short Commentaries on Proust" [1958] (*NTL1* 178), "Trying to

Understand Endgame" [1958] (*NTL1* 241, 252, 262), *An Introduction to Dialectics* [1958] (100), *Aesthetics* [1958/59] (227), *Ontology and Dialectics* [1960-61] (101), "Charmed Language" [1961] (*NTL1* 196, 207), "The Economic Crisis as Idyll" [1961] (*NTL2* 284), *Aesthetic Theory* [1970] (26, 112, 149, 285) and "The Schema of Mass Culture" [1991] (*The Culture* 75).

Although Adorno's references to Joyce in the three major essays noted above have been noticed by various critics, only a small percentage of the secondary criticism offers a sustained or extensive analysis of Adorno's interest in Joyce's work (for example, in the form of a chapter dedicated to examining the relationship between the two).[84] Amongst the many discussions about Adorno and Lukács' argument about *Ulysses*, Robert Weninger's "James Joyce in German-speaking Countries" [2009], "The Institutionalisation of 'Joyce'" [2009] and *The German Joyce* [2016] have provided some of the most comprehensive accounts and analysis of "The Position of the Narrator" and "Extorted Reconciliation". Equally, whilst various Adornian scholars have mentioned "Presuppositions" in their work, Gerald L. Bruns' article "On the Conundrum of Form and Material in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory" [2008] and Pola Groß's book *Adornos Lächeln* [*Adorno's Smile*] [2020] offer some of the most extensive and illuminating secondary criticism on Adorno's reading of Hans G. Helms' Joycean prose poem.[85]

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[84] There are countless texts that make brief references to Adorno's engagement with Joyce, usually to contextualise Adorno's dispute with Lukács. For some typical examples, see: Neil R. Davison's *James Joyce, Ulysses, and the Construction of Jewish Identity: Culture, Biography, and 'the Jew' in Modernist Europe* [1996] (13), Peter Hitchcock's "Answering as Authoring: or, Marxism's Joyce" [1999] (62), Christine van Boheemen's *Joyce, Derrida, Lacan and the Trauma of History Reading, Narrative, and Postcolonialism* [1999] (24-25), Martin Ryle and Kate Soper's "Cultural Theory and Critical Value" [2006] (29), Giuseppe Di Giacomo's "The Sensible and the Intelligible: Artistic Form and Testimony in Adorno's Reflections" [2019] (141-42), and Stefano Petrucciani's chapter "Aesthetic Theory and Critical Praxis" in his *book Theodor W. Adorno's Philosophy, Society, and Aesthetics* [2021] (129).

[85] For example, see Dieter Hasselblatt's *Lyrik heute: kritische Abenteuer mit Gedichten* [1963] (125), Michael Taylor Jones' *Constellations of Modernity: The Literary Essays of Theodor Adorno* [1978] (257), Edzard Krückeberg's *Der Begriff des Erzählens im 20. Jahrhundert: Zu den Theorien Benjamins, Adornos und Lukács* [1981] (60), Peter Demetz's *Traditions of Experiment from the Enlightenment to the Present: Essays in Honor of Peter Demetz* [1992] (350), Peter Uwe Hohendahl's *Prismatic Thought: Theodor W. Adorno* [1995] (99), Ludger Schwarte's *Die Regeln der Intuition: Kunstphilosophie nach Adorno, Heidegger und Wittgenstein* [2000] (91), Klaus Schenk's *Medienpoesie: Moderne Lyrik zwischen Stimme und Schrift* [2000] (245), Gregory Williams' "Helms Klang" [2003] (175), Wolfram Ette's *Adorno im Widerstreit: zur Präsenz seines Denkens* [2004] (456), Stefan Müller-Doohm's *Adorno: A Biography* [2005] (590), Steve Martin's "Literature and the Modern System of the Arts: Sources of Criticism in Adorno" [2006] (18), David Cunningham's "The Narrator of the Contemporary European Novel" [2006] (194), Deborah Cook's *Theodor Adorno: Key Concepts* [2014] (155), Henry W. Pickford's "Adorno and Literary Criticism" [2020] (375) and Paul Ingram's *Adorno, Dada and the Philistine: The Immanent Negation of the Institution of Art* [2020] as a selection. These also include (or are complemented by) insightful contextual or even autobiographical accounts of Helms' speech music and its intersection with Adorno's theory. See, for example, Wilfried Dörstel's comments in "The Bauermeister Studio:

Within the subsection of those who have tried to contextualise Adorno's engagement with Joyce in his theory, certain scholars have attempted to draw a more direct relationship between the two figures.[86] Critics such as Eugene O'Brien, R. B Kershner, Susan L. Solomon and Ho Ming Chang have suggested that there are more direct aesthetic and socio-political correspondences between Joyce's work and Adorno's critical theory. For example, O'Brien's book *The Question of Irish Identity in the Writings of William Butler Yeats and James Joyce* [1998] argues that Joyce's works exemplify Adorno's concept of "literature-as-critique", which negatively deconstructs a mythically constructed Irish identity to forge a new, critical one (7-8, 11). Meanwhile, R. B. Kershner's *The Culture of Joyce's Ulysses* [2010] argues that Joyce's reworking of Homeric myth potentially influenced Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (22). Susan L. Solomon's article "Inverted Commas, Unreality, and Chiasmus in 'Aeolus'" [2014] argues that Joyce and Adorno had comparable attitudes to punctuation marks and realist literature (615, 625). Lastly, Ho Ming Chang's article "The Autonomy of Modernist Literary Works of Art: Proposing for a Re-Reading of *Ulysses* with Adorno's Aesthetic Theory" [2012] explores how a re-examination of Adorno's modernist aesthetic theory could provide a new appreciation of Joyce's *Ulysses* (63). What is especially striking about these approaches is the tendency to try and pin down the exact shape of the relationship between Adorno and Joyce; for example, whilst Ming Chang argues for seeing what Adorno brings to Joyce (63), Kershner argues that Joyce *probably* influenced Adorno's theory (22).

Yet it is not easy to identify the exact nature of Adorno's engagement with Joyce because it is full of curious omissions. For example, if we return to Adorno's letter to his lover, his reply does not necessarily reveal much about how good of a reader of Joyce he was in practice. His references to the difficulty of reading *Finnegans Wake* in its original form or in translation makes one question how far Adorno may have got into the work. It is difficult to answer the fundamental question of whether

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Proto-Fluxus in Cologne 1960-62" [1992] (56-62), Gianmario Borio's "Vokalmusik als integrales Komponieren von Sprache: Zum musikliterarischen Schaffen von Hans G Helms" [1993] (41-58), Ian Pepper's "'Aesthetics of Indifference' to 'Negative Aesthetics': John Cage and Germany 1958-1972" [1997] (42), Gertrud Meyer-Denkmann's *Zeitschnitte: meines Lebens mit neuer Musik und Musikpädagogik 1950-2005* [2007] (50) and Mary Bauermeister's *Ernst Brücher ein Erinnerungsbuch* [2008] (37-34).

[86] Certain texts such as Sean Latham's "Hating Joyce Properly" [2002] have taken the slightly different approach of applying Adorno's theory to Joycean *criticism*, although he does draw comparisons between Adorno's and Joyce's uneasy relationships with the culture industry (120-21).

Adorno had actually sat down and read any of Joyce's books the whole way through.[87] There is no record of marginalia on his copies of the books, unlike his pencil annotations on, say, his copy of Samuel Beckett's *Der Namenlose* [*The Unnamable*] (a work we will discuss in the next chapter). As with any writer, the presence of books on their library shelf does not prove that the owner read them. Perhaps most frustratingly, Adorno does not seem to have quoted directly from Joyce in his writings other than using the English term "work in progress" several times in his correspondence, a phrase which is itself a title (*History* 4-5, 266 and *Lectures* 1). With this in mind, a study such as Kershner's – which does not cite any evidence that Joyce influenced Adorno other than the fact that both adapted their own versions of *The Odyssey* – merely leaps over the inconvenient gaps in Adorno's appreciation of Joyce. Of course, being able to provide a neat narrative about Adorno's interest in Joyce is tempting; after all, why would Adorno consider *Ulysses* to be a "key work" of modernism if he did not seem deeply fascinated by its contents?

However, these gaps do not necessarily need to be seen as a problem or a barrier, but should be seen as an indication of the unconventional character of Adorno's discussion of Joyce's work. For instance, the fact that Adorno owned the famous piece of secondary criticism *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake* hints towards the often secondary character of Adorno's (and his contemporaries') engagement with Joyce's writings. As the inclusion of the words "Skeleton Key" in the title indicates, the work was intended as both a summary and exegetical outline that would unlock the meaning of the *Wake*, allowing the reader to make sense of what is frequently considered to be a difficult text for Anglophone speakers and those who cannot understand English alike. Not only did Adorno share an admiration for Joyce as a writer with Thomas Mann, but both Adorno and Mann owned copies of *A Skeleton Key*.[88] Although it is not clear how Adorno engaged with the critical text, Mann gave his thoughts on the piece of secondary literature in a letter to Agnes Mayer in 1944:

[87] I was not able to gain access to the physical books as the Adorno Archive in Frankfurt is not open to the public. However, I have been able to consult photocopies of Adorno's references to Joyce in other materials at the Walter Benjamin Archive in Berlin.
[88] See the letter in the beginning of the introduction to this thesis.

> Campbell's book has kept me even more preoccupied and has suggested to me that Joyce might well be the greatest literary genius of our time. To be sure, Mr Campbell's study is admirable as an analytical and exegetical accomplishment. And what has been done here for the work of the Irishman does America credit. I am personally all the more grateful to the authors as my only access to Joyce is through the guidance of such knowledgeable books. I do not have the requisite freedom and willingness to study him myself. I sense an affinity, but would prefer not to admit it since, if this were the case, Joyce had done everything better, more boldly, more elegantly. (Mann qtd. in Weninger, "James Joyce in German-speaking Countries" 49).[89]

What is especially revealing about Mann's comments here is the fact that he betrays that he was trying to understand *Finnegans Wake* largely through secondary criticism. An approach that eschews closely reading and interpreting the text itself was not merely common amongst many twentieth-century intellectuals (who would often rather talk about Joyce's texts than taking the time to read them), it is also a useful way of conceptualising how many German speakers and other intellectuals in Adorno's circle actually engaged with the text. Various contemporaries of Adorno performed a secondary reading of Joyce in the sense that they 'read' his novels through others' interpretations, its reputation, its reception, public hearsay or even its adaptations into German writing, art and music.[90]

In this chapter, I will be arguing that Joyce was one of the prime examples of a writer who Adorno engaged with largely indirectly. His reading of Joyce depended on the reception and adaptation of *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* by those in Adorno's intellectual circles and not by a first-hand engagement with the texts themselves. I conclude that Adorno ultimately offers an idiosyncratic reading that argues that Joyce's narrative technique and language need to be adapted and *surpassed* by new literary works in order to preserve the autonomous, experimental quality of *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake.* I will illustrate this argument by reading Adorno's three major essays on Joyce ("The Position of the Narrator", "Extorted Reconciliation" and "Presuppositions") and unpublished

[89] Weninger mentions that Mann also engaged with Harry Levin's *James Joyce* [1941] (49).
[90] Please see below for my discussion of how Radek's interpretation of *Ulysses* implies that he may not have read the book.

writings in the context of the wider, largely German-language reception of Joyce's novels to establish a more extensive and clear survey of the exact character of Adorno's appreciation for the great Irish modernist writer.

In the first section, I will demonstrate how Adorno's well-known reading of *Ulysses* within the parameters of the Expressionist Debate should be understood as a characteristically indirect 'reading' of Joyce's work.[91] After quickly summarising the well-known dispute between Lukács and Adorno on the subject of Joyce's *Ulysses,* I outline how Adorno's reception of the novel as an autonomous piece of modernist art actually draws upon Radek's, Bloch's and Lukács' reception of Joyce's interior monologue and language. Through this, I show that Adorno gave an unfaithful reading of Joyce that argues that *Ulysses,* a novel from 1922, better reflects the social reality of post-war society through its expressionist techniques – an interpretation that goes beyond the initial context of Joyce's novel. In the second section, I turn to Adorno's lesser-discussed reading of *Finnegans Wake* by tracing his interest in a Joycean adaptation: Hans G. Helms' relatively neglected *Wake*-inspired text entitled *Fa:m' Ahniesgwow.* In the third and final section, I unpack how Adorno's essay on Helms' piece takes its unfaithful reading further than his fanciful interpretation of *Ulysses.* Adorno advocates for Helms as a successor to Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. Turning against Joyce's technique and language, he argues that these elements are too expressionist (to the detriment of discursivity) and too institutionalised to be of use to represent social reality. I suggest that Adorno's characterisation of Joyce's work as pure sound and Helms' work as a significant divergence from Joycean technique is unconvincing, unfaithfully misrepresenting where Joyce married both expression and discursivity, as well as the extent to which Helms was influenced by Joyce's techniques. I point out that Adorno ends up turning his back on Joyce and his previous defence of *Ulysses,* offering a critique of Joyce that resembles Lukács' position on the novel. Finally, I end by showing that Adorno's indirect reading of Joyce is, paradoxically, an attempt to preserve what the theorist considers the original *Nouveauté* of Joyce's work. For Adorno, Helms honours Joyce novels' original critical modernist quality by

[91] Please note that the way that I have chosen to divide the chapter does not indicate that Adorno did not mention the *Wake* in the first two essays and *Ulysses* in the third essay. This has been a decision based on what appears to be the dominant Joycean text informing the discussions in the respective pieces.

adapting Joycean techniques and language, thereby creating a new, modernist literature that is autonomous from but also reflective of society because it escapes the problem of Joyce's institutionalisation in capitalism.

This chapter will offer a clearer view of the actual shape of Adorno's engagement with James Joyce by including the lesser-known comments on the writer in Adorno's published and archival writings. I will also demonstrate that Adorno often 'read' Anglophone modernism in a more expansive way, showing that he did not only read literature by focusing on the text itself, but also read works through their reception and adaptations. Finally, I will suggest that whilst Adorno's reading of Joyce is often curiously full of omissions and more dependent on secondary sources than we would perhaps expect, Joyce was still one of the most important figures of Anglophone modernist literature for Adorno precisely because of an "artistic impulse" that Adorno said continues on in more recent work by other writers.[92]

**1. Adorno's Indirect Reading of *Ulysses***

To understand the actual shape of Adorno's interest in Joyce, we should begin by outlining how Adorno's most famous interpretation of Joyce – his interpretation of *Ulysses* in "The Position of the Narrator" and "Extorted Reconciliations" – should be understood as an indirect reading. Specifically, it is an indirect reading in three senses: first, his reading is secondary in the sense that his positions are made through the terms of the wider *Expressionismus-Debatte*. Not only is Adorno's reading of *Ulysses* determined by the major talking points about the novel within this debate – namely, about *Ulysses'* artistic autonomy, interior monologue and language – but Adorno's reading is also part of a larger trend of reading Joyce's fiction through its intellectual dissemination rather than through an engagement with the texts themselves. For instance, Karl Radek gave a reading of the novel that contains basic factual errors.[93] Lukács performs a reading of *Ulysses* that takes on the terms established by Ernst Bloch's interpretation of Joyce's work as a psychological, Surrealist montage

[92] Ironically, Adorno ends up presenting Helms as Germany's answer to Joyce. See the end of this chapter for more information about the idea of the German Joyce in twentieth-century Germany.
[93] For instance, Radek's description of *Ulysses* as a "book of eight hundred pages, without any stops and without any commas" is incorrect (151).

("Realism" 34).[94] Even Bloch's reading, which provides the most specific textual details out of all the readings mentioned in this section, merely describes certain plot points in *Ulysses* rather than engaging with extracts from the text itself.[95] Accordingly, Adorno also offers a secondary reading in the sense that he focuses on *Ulysses'* form more than its content (although his account of its form is also fairly abstract and overgeneralised itself). Adorno does not quote from *Ulysses* itself but discusses the critical, cognitive potential of its interior monologue and language (indeed, even his analysis of *Ulysses'* language does not point to a specific example, but instead analyses its alienated character in more general terms). Finally, Adorno's reading is secondary in the sense that he adapts Joyce's novel for his own critical ends. As I have previously noted, the Expressionist Debate centred on the question of which literary aesthetic would best reflect and negate the reification of capitalist society. Adorno takes *Ulysses,* a novel published in 1922, to make an argument that its avant-garde techniques establish an artistic autonomy that better reflects his own alienated, post-war society. Adorno's adaptation of *Ulysses* to advance his own, critical theory of literature is characteristic of his opportunistic literary criticism of Joyce.

Just as I stated in the previous chapter, the Expressionist Debate is so well trodden that I can quickly summarise Joyce's place within it. The Expressionist Debate emerged from a broader discussion of the relative merits of socialist realism and modernism. Maxim Gorky, Andrei Zhdanov and Karl Radek were key contributors to this debate. At the Soviet Writers' Congress in 1934, Radek lamented his fellow Soviet writers' interest in Joyce, an author that he judged to be ostensibly bourgeois and unrevolutionary (152-54). In the same year, Lukács would also publish his seminal

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[94] Lukács confirms that his essay is directly responding to and inflected by Bloch's reading of *Ulysses* in *The Heritage of Our Times*: "Lest my hostile assessment put the matter in a false light, I shall quote Bloch's own analysis [of Joyce's *Ulysses*.]" ("Realism" 34). Lukács' habit of reading of Joyce *through* another critic's interpretation was confirmed in a 1938 letter to Anna Seghers. There, he admits that he only "brought in Joyce and Dos Passos, for instance, for the sole reason that Bloch held them up as the towering figures of modern, avant-garde literature." (*Essays* 176). Lukács' admission that he was intervening in an existing conversation not only highlights that he was picking up on certain key themes that had been discussed by figures such as Bloch or Radek before him, but that he was also isolating the key elements of the debate that Adorno would focus on in his own interpretations of *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake:* namely, Joyce's technique of interior monologue, his language, and the connection between the two.

[95] See, for example, Bloch's brief reference to the "Nausicaa" episode in *Ulysses* in *The Heritage of our Times*: "[It] goes downwards in that the three girls on the beach speak the boarding-house language of 1900, the marmalade style by the ocean in that Bloom himself, the advertising Odysseus, is a hulking great Irish loudmouth [.]" (225).

essay entitled "Expressionism: Its Significance and Decline" ["Größe und Verfall des Expressionismus"] which established his reputation as one of the most important Marxist critics of modernism. Although he did not mention Joyce in this particular work, Lukács would apply his critique of expressionist art and literature to Joyce's *Ulysses* in "Marx and the Problem of Ideological Decay" ["Marx und das Problem des ideologischen Verfalls"] [1938] (*Essays* 134). Voicing their opposition to Lukács, Bloch and Eisler's article "To Inherit Art" ["Die Kunst zu erben"] [1938] condemned his equation of avant-garde literature with degeneracy as well as his deference to classical and high realist literature (12). Lukács returned the favour in a piece entitled "Realism in the Balance" ["Es geht um den Realismus"] [1938]. Curiously, although Lukács was responding to Eisler and Bloch's article (which does not mention Joyce), his argument ridicules and directly quotes from Bloch's reading of *Ulysses'* interior monologue in *The Heritage of Our Times* [*Erbschaft Dieser Zeit*] [1935] (Lukács, "Realism" 34; Bloch 223).[96] Two decades later, Adorno published "The Position of the Narrator in the Contemporary Novel" [1954], an essay which implicitly criticises Lukács' position. Not only does Adorno suggest that realism is a reductive aesthetic, but he also espouses the critical potential of *Ulysses'* experimental language (*NTL1* 31). However, it is in "Extorted Reconciliation" [1958] that Adorno directly criticises Lukács' attack on Joyce. In the previous year, the German translation of Lukács' work *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* was published. Lukács maintained that *Ulysses* uncritically focuses on detail to the detriment of context (*The Meaning* 18, 21). Adorno responded that it is precisely *Ulysses'* fragmented, unrealistic aesthetic that captures the fallout of the fragmented reality of the post-war landscape (*NTL1* 223).

The most well-known exchange from the Expressionist Debate is Adorno and Lukács' disagreement about the extent to which *Ulysses* captured the reality of modern society. On one side of

[96] Notably, like Bloch and Eisler, Brecht also wrote fragments criticising Lukács' position in 1938. For example, Brecht's essay "Against Georg Lukács" (written in the 1930s but published in 1967) defends *Ulysses*: "The fact that Tolstoy would have done it differently is no reason to reject Joyce's method. The criticisms were so superficially formulated that one gained the impression that if Joyce had only set his monologue in a session with a psychoanalyst, everything would have been all right. […] Without very precise measures (again of a technical sort) the interior monologue by no means reproduces reality, that is to say the totality of thought or association, as it superficially appears to do. It becomes another case of only formally, of which we should take heed – a falsification of reality." (73). However, it is important to note that Brecht's critiques of Lukács and comments on Joyce were published posthumously a decade after Adorno publicly criticised Lukács in 1958.

the debate, Lukács casts *Ulysses* as the representative of a decadent, autonomous and subjective modernist aesthetic that cannot match the representational quality of realist fiction. As Lukács puts it in *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*: "Joyce uses Dublin, Kafka and Musil the Hapsburg Monarchy, as the locus of their masterpieces. But the locus they lovingly depict is little more than [an atmospheric] backcloth; it is not basic to their artistic intention." (21). As we discussed in the previous chapter, Lukács lauded realism as the literary aesthetic that would capture the social totality and not the mere appearances of reality (92). Meanwhile, Lukács holds that Joyce's text fetishises its form to the extent that it actively marginalises and ignores the world that grounds the story – in this case, the city of Dublin. Lukács' description of Dublin as an "[atmospheric] backcloth" ["*Atmosphäre des Geschehens*"] suggests that Joyce's use of setting is superficial and purely ornamental and thereby fails to ground his characters and plot in objective reality (*Probleme* 472).[97] Intriguingly, Lukács' judgement that *Ulysses* is an ahistorical novel seems to ignore Joyce's meticulous replication of the city of Dublin on a single day. His enduring bias against *Ulysses* – which he had maintained since the 1930s – saw him continue to invoke his adaptation of Ernst Bloch's view that *Ulysses* was a piece of Surrealist montage (but more on this later). By the 1950s, Lukács was not so nakedly against the use of experimental techniques in literature as he was in the 1930s. Nonetheless, he maintained that *Ulysses*' formalism could not represent objective reality because it ultimately privileged the fragment over the whole.

On the other side of the debate, Adorno defends the autonomous quality of Joyce's novel for better capturing the fragmented nature of twentieth-century life. Adorno famously picks up Lukács' phrase "atmospheric backcloth" (or "atmosphere of events") and uses it against him:

> In Joyce, Lukács thinks, Dublin, and in Kafka and Musil, the Hapsburg Monarchy, can be felt – *hors programme*, so to speak - as an atmospheric 'backcloth' to the action, but that, he says, is a mere by-product; for the sake of his *thema probandum*, he turns the negative epic abundance that accumulates, the substantial, into a secondary issue. (*NTL1* 225).

[97] Lukács' phrase, translated literally, is "atmosphere of events".

The acidic repetition of Lukács' description of Dublin as a *mere* "atmosphere" of events is intended to expose what Adorno sees as a disingenuous reading of *Ulysses'* historicity (or lack thereof). Adorno argues that it is Lukács who chooses to marginalise the contextual detail and objective grounding of *Ulysses.* Adorno elaborates that: "Joyce does not create a fictional mythology beyond the world he represents but rather tries to conjure up that world's essence, or its essential horror, by mythifying it, as it were, through the stylistic principle [.]" (223). Of course, Adorno's description of Joyce's writing as something that "conjures up that world's essence, or its essential horror" is a tendentious reading in the sense that it does scant justice to the emotional range of the text (for example, its comic energy). He uses *Ulysses* – a novel published in 1922 and set in 1904 – to talk about the fallout of society in the 1950s. He makes the same move in his earlier interpretation of Joyce in "The Position of the Narrator", where Adorno argues that Joyce's modernist, experimental aesthetic more accurately captures his post-war condition than a high realistic fiction that assumed that it has the authority to merely reproduce the events of the war (31).[98] However, Adorno also concludes that *Ulysses*' "stylistic principle", or its privileging of avant-gardist technique over a realistic representation of events, has a critically autonomous character. As he elaborates: "Art does not come to know reality by depicting it photographically or 'perspectivally' but by expressing, through its autonomous constitution, what is concealed by the empirical form reality takes." (227). Adorno suggests that *Ulysses* reflects society because it unapologetically embraces its status as fiction and its dislocation from reality, thereby reflecting the dislocated character of twentieth-century society itself.[99]

The most important thing to take away from Adorno's famous reading of *Ulysses*' critically autonomous quality was that it was influenced by a wider conversation about two specific techniques

[98] The essay's title itself betrays Adorno's thesis that the privileged role of the omniscient narrator that was often found in realist novels needed to be questioned after the war: "To oppose what Joyce was trying to do by calling it eccentric, individualistic, and arbitrary would be unconvincing. The identity of experience in the form of a life that is articulated and possesses internal continuity - and that life was the only thing that made the narrator's stance possible - has disintegrated. One need only note how impossible it would be for someone who participated in the war to tell stories about it the way people used to tell stories about their adventures. A narrative that presented itself as though the narrator had mastered this kind of experience would rightly meet with impatience and scepticism on the part of its audience." (*NTL1* 31).

[99] Adorno promotes his ideological investment in the autonomy of art. He would continue to maintain this dialectical relationship of art and society, arguing in *Aesthetic Theory* that the aesthetic is a critical negation of reality that should be privileged as being particularly reflective of society precisely because it had been siphoned away from that very society (5).

in Joyce's novel. To elaborate, Adorno's interpretation of *Ulysses* should be understood as a secondary reading that followed and adapted his fellow Marxist intellectuals' interest in 1) Joyce's technique of interior monologue and its intersection with 2) Joyce's unique use of language. For instance, Radek helped to establish the focus on *Ulysses'* interior monologue and experimental language in his speeches on Joyce in 1934. On the former, Radek comments:

> Thought is crocheted to thought; if the thought leads off at a tangent, the author hastens to follow it up. His hero, while drunk, is assailed by hallucinations. The author breaks off his story in the middle and reproduces these hallucinations. More than eight hundred pages are taken up with one day in the hero's life. We will not dwell on the extraneous matter that is woven into Joyce's work, on how he encircles the actions and thoughts of his heroes with an intricate cobweb of allegories and mythological allusions, on all these phantasmagoria of the madhouse. We will examine only the essence of the "new method," by which naturalism is reduced to clinical observation, and romanticism and symbolism to delirious ravings. (153).

Although he does not name it, the "new method" is undoubtably the interior monologue, as indicated by Radek's intense preoccupation with what he sees as the narrative's reductive psychological character. On one hand, Radek reads the depiction of the characters' thoughts as unacceptably naturalistic.[100] By bringing up the book's various settings of the "lavatory, the brothel and the pot-house", Radek reads the narrative as providing too much detail, of offering a vulgar naturalism that exhaustively captures the minutiae or appearances of life to the detriment of capturing its essence (153). On the other hand, Radek also reads the technique as a decadent, distorting and expressionist one. Supplementing his characterisation of the *monologue intérieur* as a raving stream of random thoughts in the brains of Joyce's characters, Radek complains that the subjective, fragmented technique focuses on bourgeois individuals such as Bloom to the detriment of their whole life context.[101] In both cases, he is complaining that Joyce's naturalistic and modernist form fails to

[100] As we discussed in the previous chapter, defenders of realism such as Radek and Lukács saw naturalism as yet another form of modernism, that it only captured the appearance of life and not its essence with its focus on photographic details.
[101] Indeed, Radek interprets Stephen and Bloom as bourgeois characters who do not represent the workers (153).

capture and reflect its historical-political context, which Radek curiously identifies as the 1916 Irish Uprising (180).[102] He proposes to oppose Joyce's interior monologue by developing specifically Soviet "creative methods" (155, 182). Whilst Radek remains vague about what these Soviet-approved methods are, even admitting that the methods had not yet caught up with the political slogans that they are supposed to reflect, he argues that Soviet realism was the genuine literary form that would name and oppose the alienation of capitalist society, establishing an authentic socialist state and mindset in its stead (155).[103]

Radek believed that the problems of Joyce's technique were bound up with his language. As he continues: "Is there not some hidden meaning lurking in the eight hundred pages of his *Ulysses* – which cannot be read without special dictionaries, for Joyce attempts to create a language of his own - in order to express the thoughts and feelings which he lacks?" (154-55). This attack on Joyce's language appears to be focused on the novel's later, more overtly formally experimental chapters. The first ten chapters fit less into the idea of "creat[ing] a language of his own", a charge which would be more applicable to Joyce's *Work in Progress* during this period. Radek acknowledges this inconsistency when he argues that "the author breaks off his story in the middle and reproduces [his characters'] hallucinations" (153). Here, he notices that there is a perceptible break in the book's narrative, or a transition into more experimental language and writing, after "Wandering Rocks" (153).[104] Radek's complaint about Joyce's creative experiments with language is underlined by a conspiracy theory that Joyce is trying to lead socialist "writers to create some kind of Chinese

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[102] Although it is understandable why Radek would be interested in the revolutions in modern Irish history, it is a curious complaint about a book that is set in 1904. This is not to dismiss the redressal of apolitical readings of *Ulysses* in the scholarship by figures such as Dominic Manganiello, Emer Nolan, and Andrew Gibson. But it is worth noting that Radek himself offers a specifically politically committed reading of Joyce's work according to his own ideology.

[103] See Radek's comment: "The slogan of socialist realism is as simple and understandable as was the slogan of the Soviets, the slogan of industrialisation, of the collectivisation of our country. And it was just because this slogan did not invent a method, but only expressed the ripened requirements of revolutionary art – just for this reason it was instantly accepted and comprehended, though much work yet remains to be done before we can embody it in great works of art." (155). See also Radek's claim that Soviet realism reflects a "stormy reality, full of the most profound contradictions, which has been created by monopoly capitalism, and on the basis of that reality which it has itself created despite monopoly capitalism [it will] overcome this reality and oppose it by another reality." (155).

[104] For a similar argument in Joycean Studies that there is a perceptible break in *Ulysses* where Joyce becomes more experimental with his writing, see Hugh Kenner's argument in his chapter "The Arranger" in his book *Ulysses* [1980] (61-63).

alphabet without commas so that it cannot reach the masses of the people." (180). Read through his theory that the Chinese writing system was to blame for preventing the revolution of the Chinese proletariat (which incorrectly suggests that a person would have to learn the 40,000 characters that exist in the system), Radek suggests that the difficulty of *Ulysses'* language limits the novel's critical potential (180). His position rests on the assumptions that working-class readers have limited literary tastes and that they only read novels that are easy to understand because, presumably, such readability makes it easier to uncover the socialist message behind them (180).

In Bloch's lesser-explored comments on Joyce in *The Heritage of Our Times*, he interprets *Ulysses'* monologue interior and language more charitably than Radek. First, Bloch's analysis of Joyce's "inner dialogue" suggests that *Ulysses'* narrative could be understood as a Surrealistic montage (204-05). He describes the technique accordingly: "Finally *Joyce:* a mouth without ego is in the middle of the flowing drive here, indeed beneath it, drinking it, babbling it, pouring it out." (223). In an eccentric critical-creative reading of Joyce's narrative, Bloch offers one of the various psychoanalytic interpretations of *Ulysses* that would be made by German-speaking critics in the 1930s, from Carl Jung to Bertolt Brecht.[105] As Bloch continues: "In the hands of Joyce even the world of Odysseus became a kaleidoscopic gallery of the disintegrating and disintegrated world of today in

[105] Bloch's psychoanalytic interpretation of *Ulysses*' interior monologue and language was matched by similar interpretations by both Bertolt Brecht and Carl Jung. As I commented above, Brecht's interpretation of Joyce was not published until 1967. However, as the editors of the *New Left Review* have noted in "Introduction to Brecht on Lukács" [1974], Brecht did read out some of his fragments on Lukács to Benjamin, which suggests that Adorno may have also been aware of Brecht's feelings about the novel (33-38). For example, Brecht wrote down that: "In Joyce's great satirical novel, *Ulysses*, there is – besides the use of various styles of writing and other unusual features – the so-called interior monologue. A petty-bourgeois woman lies in bed in the morning and meditates. Her thoughts are reproduced disconnectedly, criss-crossing, flowing into each other. This chapter could hardly have been written but for Freud. The attacks which it drew upon its author were the same as Freud in his day suffered. They rained down: pornography, morbid pleasure in filth, overestimation of events below the navel, immorality and so on. Astonishingly, some Marxists associated themselves with this nonsense, adding in their revulsion the epithet of petty-bourgeois. As a technical method the interior monologue was equally rejected; it was said to be *formalistic*." (73). Further to this, Adorno and Benjamin discussed Carl Jung's ambivalent review of *Ulysses* from 1932 in their correspondence. In a letter from 5 December 1934, Adorno commented that he had read Jung's "not insignificant essay on Joyce" (*Complete* 61). Adorno does not provide any detail about how much Jung's interpretation had impressed on his reading of *Ulysses*, but we can see that it shares many of the terms of Bloch's, Brecht's and indeed Adorno's more psychoanalytic interpretations of the novels' interior monologue and language. For example, take the following excerpt from Jung's review: "The pitiless and uninterrupted stream rolls by, and its velocity or precipitation grows in the last forty pages till it sweeps away even the marks of punctuation. It thus gives cruelest expressions to that emptiness which is both breath taking and stifling, which is under such tension, or is so filled to bursting, as to grow unbearable." (584-85). Accordingly, in a letter to Joyce on 27 September 1932, Jung observed that: "Your *Ulysses* has presented the world such an upsetting psychological problem that repeatedly I have been called in as a supposed authority on psychological matters." (Jung qtd. in Ellmann 629).

microscopic cross-section – no more than a cross-section, because people today lack something [.]" (228). Bloch's description of *Ulysses'* interior monologue as a narrative disintegration is strikingly ambivalent. His creative reconstruction of, say, Bloom's interior monologue as an unravelled, nonsensical stream that is emptied even of its ego accords with Radek's view that Joyce's dialogue only ever offers a fragment of life in a manner that accords with the impotency of the individual under capitalism. Bloch actively emphasises the narrative's morose, fragmented quality.[106] But Bloch's insistence on reading the novel's apparent deteriorating narrative as an exploding montage reflects his wider thesis in *The Heritage in Our Times* that the avant-garde technique of montage had a key critical potential. With its fragmentary yet unifying character, Bloch's position was that montage was better at capturing and critiquing the fragmentary, exploded experience of capitalism than a realism that took its objectivity for granted (197).[107]

Bloch also holds that Joyce's language is intrinsically connected to his interior monologue.[108] Take when Bloch states:

> The language totally emulates this decay [of the ego], it is not finished and already shaped, let alone articulated, but open and confused. What otherwise speaks, misspeaks, puns at times of tiredness, in pauses in the conversation or in dreamy, also nervous people: here it has gone wild. The words have become redundant, sacked from their sense-relationship, sometimes the language moves like a chopped-up worm, sometimes it comes together like an animated cartoon, sometimes it hangs down like flies into the action. […] The language barely follows grammatical rules, hardly ever logical ones (of today); its source is supposed to be primary sound-pictorial relationship, its sense to the unleashing and grasping of subconscious life; through this it is woken to life again, the words are given back their prelogical value. (223).

[106] As we will see below, Bloch's description of the decay of *Ulysses'* language betrays that Bloch is perhaps more ambivalent about Joyce's novel than, say, Adorno. Yet, he is markedly more receptive to Joyce's technique and language than either Radek or Lukács.
[107] This position shares striking similarities with Adorno's view that modernism's abstract form more accurately captured an abstracted society.
[108] See Bloch's comment that "the 'inner dialogue' in Joyce […] does not even have the ego as witness, even the body of the speaker almost falls away which encloses the language, and an anonymous flash-flood is loosed." (*The Heritage* 224).

Bloch situates the language of *Ulysses* in the tradition of Surrealism as it was outlined in Breton's *Manifesto of Surrealism* [*Manifeste du surréalisme*] [1924]. For example, Bloch's choice to interpret *Ulysses'* language as "dream-like" echoes what Breton espoused as the value of investigating dreams in order to properly grasp "an absolute reality, or *surreality*." (3). Indeed, Bloch's invocation of the psychoanalytic concepts of "ego", "drive", "subconscious life" and "prelogical value" accords with the influence of Freud on Breton's theory. Just as Freud suggested that the interpretation of dreams could reveal something about the unconscious mind, Breton held that an associative, unbridled automatic aesthetic could reveal the workings of the mind often suppressed by organised thought (3). Bloch's particular emphasis on the dislocation of words from their meanings – with his image of Joycean language as a "chopped up worm" (which curiously echoes Radek's own description of *Ulysses* as "crawling with worms" [153]) – intimates that there is something in *Ulysses'* experimental language that reveals the otherwise obscured psychological reality of the twentieth century.

Lukács offered an interpretation of the uses of interior monologue and language that builds upon Radek's and Bloch's observations.[109] In his earlier writings, Lukács held that Joyce's interior monologue was a typical example of the degenerate, experimental techniques that marked modernism's disjuncture with real life. For instance, in "Realism in the Balance", Lukács argues that in *Ulysses*' "narrative method", Joyce merely constructs his characters "directly in terms of their own consciousness," in direct opposition to Thomas Mann's approach of "contrasting that consciousness with a reality independent of" his characters (35-36). After the failed Hungarian Revolution of 1956, Lukács became less dogmatic about the technique of interior monologue – at least for his favourite realist authors:

> The distinctions that concern us are not those between stylistic 'techniques' in the formalistic sense. It is the view of the world, the ideology or *weltanschauung* underlying a writer's work, that counts. And it is the writer's attempt to reproduce this view of the world which constitutes his 'intention' and is the formative principle underlying the style of a given piece

[109] As we noted above, Lukács borrowed and adapted Bloch's interpretation that *Ulysses* is a Surrealist montage. However, his interpretation is closer to Radek's negative reading of the novel's technique and language.

> of writing. Looked at in this way, style ceases to be a formalistic category. Rather, it is rooted in content; it is the specific form of a specific content. Content determines form. But there is no content of which Man himself is not the focal point. (*The Meaning* 19).[110]

Lukács' rather dubious insistence on wresting "style" from any association with formalism by grounding it in content reflects his more flexible (yet generally unmoved) adherence to the idea that literature should reflect humanity's place in the social totality. But this did not redeem Joycean technique in Lukács' eyes: "Compare, for instance, Bloom's monologue in the lavatory or Molly's monologue in bed, at the beginning and at the end of *Ulysses*, with Goethe's early-morning monologue as conceived by Thomas Mann in his *Lotte in Weimar.* Plainly, the same stylistic technique is being employed." (17). Lukács' juxtaposition of Bloom in the lavatory against Mann's depiction of a giant of German national literature betrays that Lukács does not treat their versions of *monologue intérieur* on the same terms.[111] Lukács interprets Mann's interior monologue as "simply a technical device" that is dynamic and that develops a wider story about a man and his place in the world (18-19). He interprets Joyce's interior monologue by drawing upon and *distorting* Bloch's characterisation of the technique as a drunken, surrealistic barrage of unconscious thoughts. Lukács builds upon this psychologising approach by taking *Ulysses'* famed narrative method of interior monologue literally. Lukács reads Bloom's and Stephen's thoughts, with their irrelevant, free associations, as the mark of a self-absorbed individualism that fills the page with the characters' consciousness, thereby failing to reflect on their own "personal history" or the world beyond them (18-21). Whilst it is not clear why Lukács will not read *Ulysses* more charitably (for example, the gradual disclosure of Rudy's death provides some personal history for Bloom [Joyce, *Ulysses* 74]),

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[110] Lukács writes about his transition to a more accommodating view towards literary style in the third chapter of *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*; there, Lukács promotes what he calls a "critical realism" – a literary form that largely resembles his previously preferred aesthetic of "socialist realism" except for being avowedly less politically dogmatic in its aims (93). In this case, he admits that although writers such as Mann, Thomas Wolfe and Werner Warsinsky are directly influenced by and use Joycean technique, he holds that these writers are critical realists because the ends to which they use this technique reflects the wider reality of the world (51, 86, 90).

[111] Lukács' decision to highlight the moment on the lavatory mirrors Radek's disgust with what he saw as the vulgar moments of the novel in which the "author relentlessly pursues [his characters] into the lavatory, the brothel and the pot-house" (153).

Lukács' late essay still paints Joyce as a writer who promotes an ahistorical formalism that fetishises technique as an end in itself.

Lukács agreed that the fragmented aesthetic of the interior monologue is reflected in Joyce's language. Lukács reads Joyce's narrative through Herwarth Walden's presentation of Expressionist language: "But it is the word that rules. The word shatters the sentence and the work of art is a mosaic. Only words can bind. Sentences are always just picked up out of nowhere [.]" (Walden qtd. in Lukács, "Realism" 44). Lukács argues that Walden's theory of language is a prime example of the Nietzschean definition of decadence: rejecting totality by unsealing the word from the sentence ("Realism" 44). Lukács' interpretation of *Ulysses*' language as a kind of mosaic focuses on the book's parts to the detriment of its moments of unity. Whilst a chapter like "Penelope" does not follow the traditional sentence structure, the full stop at the end of the novel indicates that it does not completely give up on the sentence (nor the sentence's apparent unifying function) (Joyce, *Ulysses* 644).[112] Of course, the sentence famously runs on for many pages in the final chapter, a technique which Nietzsche might have construed as decadent: "the sentence encroaches on the page, obscuring its meaning [.]" (Nietzsche qtd. in Lukács, "Realism" 44).[113] But Lukács does not consider that this single sentence might be interpreted as a more effective way of unifying the words in the interior monologue than what he calls the more "traditional" aesthetic of realist writing ("Realism" 36). Lukács anticipates this criticism. He admits that modernist texts do sometimes usher towards a sense of unity - a moment which brushes against his presentation of Joyce's language as wholly fragmentary (44). Yet when Lukács admits that in practice "even Joyce" does not apply Walden's approach to language with one hundred percent consistency, he insists that Joyce's writing is a failed attempt at achieving artistic unity. As he states: "any cohesive principles [that modernist art] contains must stem from subject-matter alien to it. Hence the super-imposed commentaries, the theory of simultaneity, and so on." (44-45). Lukács does not give an example of a superimposed commentary here. But considering that Joyce gave his friends two explanatory schemas (the Linati and the Gilbert schemas)

[112] In fact, Joyce's scepticism of the sentence in the final chapter of *Ulysses* could be said to be in pursuit of a higher unity.
[113] Although, of course, Nietzsche is not talking about *Ulysses* here, a book that he would never live to see.

to help give an overarching structure to what is a difficult text made up of different parts, such structures might be interpreted as giving some credence to Lukács' interpretation of *Ulysses* as unwieldy and resistant to synthesis. Even though Lukács often exaggerates the fragmentary effects of *Ulysses'* interior monologue and language, he remains insistent that they cannot successfully reflect objective reality (43-4).

Adorno expands upon the specific terms of the debate laid out by Radek, Lukács and Bloch above, offering his own position on Joyce's interior monologue and language. First, Adorno suggests that Joyce distinguishes his critical literature from high realism by creating a language that throws off the assumption that words have an objective meaning. As Adorno states:

> This would imply that the novel should concentrate on what reportage will not handle. In contrast to painting, however, language imposes limits on the novel's emancipation from the object and forces the novel to present the semblance of a report: consistently, Joyce linked the novel's rebellion against realism with a rebellion against discursive language. (*NTL1* 31).

Here, Adorno is arguing that Joyce's language attempts to navigate the problem of form. He is aware that the novel cannot escape its status as an object that consists of words. As a compromise, Adorno holds that *Ulysses* deliberately throws away the tyranny of "*diskursive Sprache*" ["discursive language"] (*Noten* 47). Adorno does not make it clear what he means by "discursive language" here, which comes close to being a tautology. However, like the English adjective "discursive", the original German descriptor of "*diskursive*" refers to the idea of discourse, or connected, ordered and elaborated speech or writing about a given subject. He claims that Joyce both unsealed the relationship between sign and signifier and severed the connection between words and sounds that were taken for granted, therefore breaking up elaborate, coherent pieces of writing or speech into separate, alienated units.[114] If we turn to other instances of Adorno's use of the word "discursive" – for example, the later essay on Hans G. Helms' "Presuppositions" ["Voraussetzungen"] [1961] - Adorno confirms that he uses it in the latter sense of privileging expression over "discursive

[114] See my discussion of the disjuncture between the signifier and the signified in the previous chapter.

signification" (*NTL2* 98). As we will see in our discussion of *Finnegans Wake,* Adorno reads Joyce as an expressionist writer who has to use experimental language to dislocate meaning from its signs. On one level, Adorno argues that modernist language dislocates signs from conventional meanings to avoid falling into the pitfalls of naturalist or realist forms that pretend that the world can be directly photographed and reported on. On another level, however, he wants to avoid the institutionalisation of the association of specific images with specific, exhausted meanings (as we saw in his treatment of allegory in the previous chapter).

Adorno claims that the disintegrated language in Joyce's interior monologue more effectively reflects reality than realist literature. As Adorno puts it:

> A common feature of the great novelists of the age is that in their work the novelistic precept 'this is how it is,' thought through to its ultimate consequences, releases a series of historical archetypes; this occurs in Proust's involuntary memory as in Kafka's parables and Joyce's epic cryptograms. The literary subject who declares himself free of the conventions of concrete representation acknowledges his own impotence at the same time; he acknowledges the superior strength of the world of things that reappears in the midst of the monologue. Thus a second language is produced, distilled to a large extent from the residue of the first, a deteriorated associative language of things which permeates not only the novelist's monologue but also that of the innumerable people estranged from the first language who make up the masses. (*NTL1* 35).

As we discussed in the previous chapter, Lukács would distinguish realism from naturalism, and therefore would not conflate realism as a form with the quality of being *realistic*. Whilst Adorno is aware that Lukács defines realism as that which reflects an objective reality that supersedes the perceptible 'surface of life', Adorno often defines "realism" reductively as realistic in the naturalistic sense, arguing that it feigns to be "concrete" in its representation of society. As an extreme parody of this photographic aesthetic, Adorno suggests that it is precisely the writers who are accused of creating lesser, expressionist montages (i.e. Joyce and Proust) who truly capture "how it is" ("it" meaning reality) precisely because they shirk an aesthetic that assumes to capture reality. Adorno's

view that Joyce offers a second, *new* "deteriorated associative language of things" insists that *Ulysses'* language and monologues accept and weaponise their "impotence", or their inability to represent society using the literary aesthetic of the status quo. Again, Adorno invokes the capitalist imagery of "deteriorated […] things" that we saw in his essay on Dickens to support his view that *Ulysses* gives him a language that he can draw upon for his own devices (i.e. to critique capitalist alienation in his literary theory). Now that we have outlined Adorno's highly mediated reading of *Ulysses,* we will see how he developed, revised and, most importantly, critiqued his position on the autonomous quality of the Joycean interior monologue and language just two years later via a Joycean adaptation, taking his unfaithful reading of Joyce to the extreme.

**2. Hans G. Helms' Adaptation of Joyce**

Although Adorno's reading of *Ulysses'* autonomous, modernist quality in his dispute with Lukács has been analysed more extensively, Adorno also engaged with a lesser known yet perhaps more significant secondary reading of Joyce's final novel. The German poet musician Hans G. Helms was one of the most important readers of Joyce in Adorno's circle. Critically, Helms offered a slightly different type of secondary reading that *adapted* Joycean texts into his own literary-musical works. As a German Jewish musician who had recently taught himself composition, Helms moved to Cologne in 1957 to work at the pioneering Studio for Electronic Music [*Studio für Elektronische Musik*] based at the broadcasting institution *Westdeutscher Rundfunk* (WDR). Integrally, it was during this period that Helms formed working friendships with other important figures of the Darmstadt School, a group of musicians who were associated with and attended the *Darmstädter Ferienkurse,* an annual summer school of contemporary classical music. It was within this circle of musical friends that Helms found the opportunity to share his interest in James Joyce. Florian Neuner describes how Helms held a legendary Joyce Reading Group at his flat in Cologne that discussed the first thirty pages ["*ersten dreißig Seiten*"] of *Finnegans Wake* (15). One participant, the Hungarian-Austrian composer György Ligeti, reflected that:

> I could not make it out by myself, my English is not good enough for that. In my Cologne days a small circle of friends met once a week, Koenig, Kagel, Helms, Evangelisti, Metzger

> the critic and myself, and we read *Finnegans Wake* carefully, just like people studying texts in a Talmud school, finding various interpretations. What impressed me in Joyce […] was his way of treating language as raw material; otherwise his mentality in general is not my cup of tea. (57).

The attendees brought their different linguistic skills, from Evangelisti with his Italian to Ligeti with his Hungarian, which complemented the multilingual dimension of the text itself. Ligeti's comments on his weaker English skills and his lack of interest in Joyce's wider mentality betrays the important role that Helms had in helping drive the reading group, especially as someone who knew English and was an avowed Joycean. Helms' status as host reflected his clear personal admiration for a novel that he would interpret and adapt for his own creative projects. In this period, Helms would produce two pieces explicitly influenced by *Finnegans Wake* entitled *Fa:m' Ahniesgwow* [1959] and *daidalos* [1961].[115]

In the early days of their correspondence, Helms wrote to Adorno to ask him if he would read the first of these two Joyce-inspired works. On 20 August 1958, Helms sent a letter that introduced and outlined his project of a sound poem entitled *Imre Ahniesgwow*. This commentary was accompanied by a draft of the piece itself (Helms, TWAA 588/13). Helms' description of his work as "not yet currently finished" ["*Der heute noch nicht abgeschlossene Text*"] emphasises the fact that *Imre Ahniesgwow* was an earlier title and draft of what would become the final published piece *Fa:m' Ahniesgwow* just a year later (TWAA 588/10). Yet the still extensive, unpublished draft should be understood as a text that was read by and taken seriously by Adorno. As Helms comments: "In Cologne you gave me permission to send you part of one of my texts and promised to give it your attention. I would now like to take you at your word." ["*In Köln gaben Sie mir Erlaubnis, Ihnen einen Teil eines meiner Texte zu senden, und versprachen, diesem Ihre Aufmerksamkeit zu schenken. Ich möchte Sie nun beim Worte nehmen*."] (TWAA 588/10). This alleged promise made by Adorno indicates that the theorist had found great potential in this younger composer and his ideas. His offer to read Helms' work marks the beginning of an intellectual, symbiotic relationship between the two

[115] The title *daidalos* is a clear nod to Stephen Daedalus.

figures (Bernd A. Laska convincingly shows how Helms acted both as a student and intellectual companion to Adorno in the 1960s when he more extensively engaged with the figures and ideas of the Frankfurt School [154]). Helms' request for Adorno to act as a peer reviewer for his creative writing also marks the beginning of one of Adorno's most extensive engagements with *Finnegans Wake* – an engagement that was made, crucially, through Helms' reconfiguration of Joyce's text.

Helms' introductory letter on *Imre Ahniesgwow* outlines the artistic intentions – and Joycean influence – that underline his conception. Firstly, Helms presents his formation of an experimental, hybrid form that is both a textual sound poem as well as a sheet of music. As a piece that reflects the contributions of its respective artistic genres (for example, its status as both a linguistic composition and an instrumental composition), as well as the connections that Helms makes between them (for example, that both compositions can be read out loud), it was apt that Helms would later use the construction "Speech-Music-Compositions" ["*Sprach-Musik-Kompositionen*"] to describe his Joycean pieces *Fa:m' Ahniesgwow* and *daidalos* (Helms qtd. in Neuner 15). As part of this poetic and musical approach to the notion of composition, Helms discusses how the draft should be divided into structures ["*Strukturen*"]. (TWAA 588/11).[116] Helms foists structures onto an otherwise flowing, babbling prose poem in order to bring the aesthetic parts of the musical composition together, thereby mapping them onto the literary typescript. Indeed, his comments that the five "macrostructures" ["*Makrostrukturen*"] in this particular draft "are based on a timetable. Time means reading time. The reading times of the individual structures are in a composed relationship to each other" demonstrates how exactly he brought certain musical parameters to literature (TWAA 588/11).[117] In this instance, he brings in the specific temporal dimension of reading sheet music to the poem. If we turn to his use of language itself, Helms clearly adopts Joyce's multilingual approach to language in the *Wake* that creatively coined new words. Joyce's influence is clear when Helms explains in his letter to Adorno that he would draw upon the following languages: "German, Low German, Middle and Old High

[116] For an example of one of Helms' structures, see the "Synchronisation plan for structure I,1" ["Synchronisationsplan zur Struktur I,1"] that was included alongside *Fa:m' Ahniesgwow* when it was published in 1959.

[117] "*Ihnen wie auch den Mikrostrukturen liegt ein Zeitplan zugrunde. Zeit meint Lesezeit. Die Lesezeiten der einzelnen Strukturen stehen in einem komponierten Verhältnis zu einander*." (Helms, TWAA 588/11).

German; Gothic; Old Norse, Anglo-Saxon; Dutch, English, Danish, Norwegian, Swedish; Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French; Welsh; Russian; Upper Sorbian; Hungarian; Hebrew, Yiddish [...] Arabic; Turkish; Sanskrit; Malay [,]" as well as "German dialects", "Americanisms" and "Cherokee" (TWAA 588/10-11). By taking from these diverse linguistic traditions, Helms was emphatic that the material of his piece could be broken down into three linguistic parameters ["*Parameter*"]: "the phonetic, the semantic and the phonological" ["*das Phonetische, das Semantische und das Phonologische*"] (TWAA 588/11). Whilst he argues that the phonological ["*phonologisches*"] material would be supplied by Cherokee, he indicates that he is also invoking the two other parameters of the "semantic and phonetic material (as in Joyce)" ["*semantisches und phonetsiches Material* (*wie bei Joyce*) [.]" (TWAA 588/11).

As the parenthesis indicates, Helms was clear that his approach to language in this work was directly lifted from Joyce's use of language in *Finnegans Wake.* His reference to the "semantic" aspect of Joyce's language refers to how the *Wake* plays with meaning. For instance, take the word "boke" in the opening section of Joyce's novel (*Finnegans* 13). Joyce is punning on a word that can be taken to mean "vomit" ("boke") in Northern Irish dialect as well as an allusion to a book (which was sometimes written as "boke" in Middle English). Meanwhile, his reference to the "phonetic" aspect of Joyce's language refers to the study, use and perception of the speech sounds that make up the words in the text. Take the phrase "pollyfool fiansees" in the novel (15). When read out loud, these words use the English sounds that make up the words "Polly" (or "poly"), "fool" and "fiancés" to resemble the French sounds in the phrase "*Parlez-vous Francais*?" (i.e. "Do you speak French?"). By identifying these playful linguistic elements in Joyce's work, Helms emphasises that he was taken by Joyce's bastardisation of language. Helms announces to Adorno that he encourages the very "fornication" ["*die Unzucht*"] of German with different languages that was denounced by the poet Karl Kraus (TWAA 588/12).[118] Helms was clearly drawn to the two contrasting yet complementary

[118] In his posthumously published work *Die Sprache*, Kraus advocated for "Sanctions against public fornication committed with the German language." ["*Strafbestimmungen gegen die öffentliche Unzucht, die mit der deutschen Sprache getrieben wird.*"] (21).

ways in which the *Wake's* so-called "fornication" of language operated. For example, take the passage about the death of the novel's namesake, the builder Finnegan:

> The fall
>
> (bababadalgharaghtakamminarronnkonnbronntonner- ronntuonnthunntrovarrhounawnskawnt oohoohoordenenthur- nuk!) […] The great fall of the offwall entailed at such short notice the pftjschute of Finnegan*,* erse solid man [.] (Joyce, *Finnegans* 3).

The fall of man is mirrored by another fall in the Bible; the prefix "baba" in the lengthy word here is frequently used in the novel to denote the fall of the Tower of Babel, a story that attempts to explain the phenomenon of multilingualism. As with Helms' list of languages, he copied how *Finnegans Wake* mixed different languages to make new combinations of different phonetic parts and, with this, new meanings for these combinations. As well as unifying disparate linguistic traditions, Helms was also attracted to how multilingualism defamiliarised language.[119] Whilst *Finnegans Wake* clearly invokes Anglophone allusions, words, syntax and sounds, it also resists being considered a strictly 'English' text. In another reference to Babel, "[the] babbelers with their thangas vain have been (confusium hold them!) [,]" Joyce also puns about the confusion ["confusium"] that he will cause to his readers with his novel's alienating babbling, with its combination of unfamiliar patterns of unfamiliar linguistic sounds and meanings. Helms explains to Adorno that he also wants his poetic conception to dislocate institutionalised, conventional conflations of words with certain meanings by forcing words to reflect upon themselves, namely via a confrontation with other strange words (TWAA 588/11).[120]

Having set up his ideas in the explanatory letter, we can see that Helms applies these ideas in practice to the draft poem that follows. On one level, Helms offers *Imre Ahniesgwow* (and, indeed, the later version *Fa:m' Ahniesgwow*) as an account of a love story between "Helène", the daughter of a Finnish Nazi general, and "Michael", a German Jewish man (TWAA 588/12). However, this is

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[119] For example, see the following discussion of the defamiliarisation of language in *Finnegans Wake*: "in the Nichtian glossery which purveys aprioric roots for aposteriorious tongues this is nat language in any sinse of the world" (Joyce 83).

[120] Literally, "by analysing itself - through confrontation with its strange stepbrother" ["*indem es sich - durch Konfrontation mit seinem fremden Stiefbruder*"] (Helms, TWAA 588/12).

perhaps not the most perceptible part of the narrative. Like *Finnegans Wake,* the experimental words, form, and graphic arrangement – not to mention the sound - take centre stage and supersede the idea of a merely 'narrated' story. As the composition is a type of poetic musical score, it is difficult to fully describe the graphic arrangement of the text on the page without looking at the document itself.[121] With its use of white space, indentation, phonetic symbols and other symbols beyond letters (for example, there is a footnote-like, extralinguistic symbol on page 588/15), Helms' typewritten speech-music-composition resembles the musical-linguistic experiments of the American composer John Cage.[122] Considering that Cage attended and lectured at the Darmstadt Summer School in 1958, wrote his own piece based on the *Wake* and was a personal friend of Helms, this is no coincidence.[123] If we concentrate on the words in *Imre* themselves, we can see the piece's linguistic inheritances from *Finnegans Wake.* For instance, take Helms' sentence: "Ketch up, its timor nau!" (TWAA 588/16). We can observe how Helms is playing with semantics. In German, the sauce ketchup was in some rare contexts referred to as "*Catchup*", a now obsolete form of the common term "*der Ketchup*" today. Helms is playing with the fact that this phrase sounds like the English command to "catch up". Meanwhile, "Ketch" can also be taken to mean a boat, whilst "timor" can be taken as a reference to the Timor Sea, and the "Nau" is a river that is also a tributary of the River Danube in Germany. This collection of imagery associated with water draws on the imagery in the Anna Livia Plurabelle section in *Finnegans Wake* (i.e. Part 1, Book 8)*,* a chapter which famously lists rivers and other bodies of water from around the world (Joyce 196-216). If we then look at the phonetics of this sentence, an English speaker might read this as "Catch up, it's time now!". Here, Helms echoes T.S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* [1922], with its imperative: "HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME" (34). Like Eliot and

[121] Please note that due to copyright reasons, I have not been able to take pictures or otherwise reproduce the draft of *Imre Ahniesgwow* beyond writing down quotations of the text. Equally, as *Fa:m' Ahniesgwow* has famously not been reprinted since it was published in 1959 (and represents a rare collection of objects itself), it is a rare publication that I have not been able to consult beyond the scan of the composition held in the Walter Benjamin Archive in Berlin (again, I could not take pictures of this due to copyright reasons). However, the archive of Hans G. Helms' documents will be opened to researchers in 2022, ten years after his death. Subject to copyright, I intend to address this omission in a future publication but this is beyond the scope of my dissertation due to these time constraints.

[122] See, for example, John Cage's "Lecture on Nothing" [1959] which was published in the same year as *Fa:m' Ahniesgwow* (95-112).

[123] Cage's piece is entitled *Roaratorio, an Irish circus on Finnegans* Wake [1979]. See Martin Iddon's monograph *New Music at Darmstadt: Nono, Stockhausen, Cage, and Boulez* [2013] for more information on Cage's time at Darmstadt.

indeed Joyce, Helms is keen to draw attention to the intertextuality in his work. Helms makes various references to modernist figures, from a reference to Marcel Proust ("Marterzell Prustjäh"), to one of the figures in Beckett's *Waiting For Godot* ("Estragon") (TWAA 588/15 and TWAA 588/20). Fundamentally, Helms uses this playful form of modernist intertextuality to make Joyce's influence explicit to the reader: the words "Finnentoe, […] Finnengène" can be found in the midst of this draft (TWAA 588/15).

After exchanging a few letters following this letter in question, Helms was anxious to get a direct opinion on his piece. In a letter from 28 December 1958, Helms asks: "Do you feel like writing to me something about my text once in a while?" ["*Haben Sie Lust, mir gelegentlich einmal etwas zu meinem Text zu schreiben*?"] (TWAA 588/42). Adorno responded on 27 February 1959, devoting the final paragraph to the topic of Helms' text. He begins by admitting that he has not had any time to talk about Helms' piece. However, he moves on and states that the work has piqued his interest. Adorno remarks that he has only one question to ask: whether the unfurling of the poem's "artistic impulse" ["*künstlerischen Impuls*"] into a "system" ["*System*"] might be in real danger of turning against this very artistic impulse itself ["*gegen diesen Impuls selber sich zu kehren*"] (TWAA 588/46).[124] To an extent, Adorno appears to be concerned with how the critical quality of the piece, its autonomy, its spontaneity, might be compromised by being organised by the hand of Helms, with his "*Strukturen*" and guiding principles for his work outlined in his explanatory letter. It is important to note, however, that Adorno does not necessarily see this tension between the artistic impulse and the structures to be a failing. He immediately clarifies that: "This is not an objection, only the naming of an antinomy" ["*Das ist kein Einwand, nur die Benennung einer Antinomie* [.]"] (TWAA 588/46). As we will soon see, Adorno's question here anticipates a major point that he would go on to make about a productive antinomy between chance and construction in art in a public response to the published version of this draft. Indeed, after his composition was published in 1959 by DuMont-Schauberg Press (an edited and longer version of *Imre* which was now under the name *Fa:m' Ahniesgwow*), Helms was delighted to

[124] Elements of Adorno's position here echo Lukács' concerns that order is externally supplied to the modernist artwork via schemata or criticism. See, for example, Lukács' criticism of modernism's "super-imposed commentaries, the theory of simultaneity, and so on." ("Realism" 44-45).

see that it had caught Adorno's attention. In a letter dated 29 March 1960, Helms excitedly mentions that he had heard that Adorno wanted to participate in an event celebrating the musical poem: "I am very grateful to you from the bottom of my heart for your extraordinary interest in my work, especially in my book. Dr. Frisé wrote to me that you had talked to him about me and *Fa:m' Ahniesgwow*, and that in addition to your interest in my book, you expressed your willingness to participate in a programme about it at the time of our possible event in Cologne. I am very, very happy!" (TWAA 588/59).[125]

The programme that Helms is referring to here did take place in 1960, attesting to the specific performative dimension of *Fa:m' Ahniesgwow* both when it was performed by Helms *and* when it was disseminated by Adorno. The work is not so much a single document as it is a collection of objects; when the musical-poetic piece was published in 1959, it included a main, paperback volume of the text which had a small proportion of folded sheets, a brochure entitled "Synchronisation Plan for Structure I, 1" ["Synchronisationsplan zur Struktur I, 1"] and an LP of Helms reading out this work. The cluster also contained an afterword by Helms' friend and collaborator, the composer Gottfried Michael Koenig (this was referred to in a letter to Adorno as "*Koenigs Nachwort*") (Helms, TWAA 588/50). Alongside the draft entitled *Imre Ahniesgwow*, Adorno had copies of these manuscripts that make up *Fa:m' Ahniesgwow* in his personal library. The strange form of this artefact that cannot strictly be referred to as a text alone, especially with its inclusion of the LP, embodies the central performative element to a work that was also a piece of music and speech. Helms delivered the piece on various occasions; for example, on 16 January 1959, he gave a performance of the earlier version – or *Imre* - at the Düsseldorf Galerie 22. At another reading in March 1960, this time in the Studio Mary Bauermeister, Helms read out his poem as well as several passages from *Finnegans Wake* (Dörstel 58, 60). Elsewhere, Helms would complain in a letter to Adorno that he had made some speech mistakes in a recording of the "two Joyce texts" ["*der beiden Joyce-Text*"] (TWAA

[125] "*… recht von Herzen dankbar bin ich Ihnen für Ihre außerordentliche Anteilnahme an meiner Arbeit, insbesondere an meinem Buch. Herr Dr. Frisé schrieb mir, daß Sie mit ihm sich über mich und Fa:m' Ahniesgwow unterhalten haben, ihm außer Ihrem Interess an meinem Buch gar Ihr Bereitschagt bekundeten, zur Zeit unserer möglichen kölner Veranstaltung auch an einer Sendung darüber mitzuwirken. Ich bin sehr, sehr glücklich*!" (Helms, TWAA 588/59).

588/73). Whilst it is not stated which texts Helms was talking about here (for example, he could have read from the *Wake* and *Fa:m'* or perhaps even from both *Fa:m'* and his second Joyce-inspired piece *daidalos*), he reveals that he considered his own work to be a "Joyce-text", and would often blur the boundaries between his and Joyce's language by reading their respective texts out loud, forcing their words to mix in the same performance. In another collaboration, Adorno publicly responded to *Fa:m'* by writing his own speech. Helms' hope that the theorist might participate in a programme in celebration of *Fa:m'* was realised when Adorno gave a paper at the Atelier Die Brücke entitled "Vorraussetzung: Aus Anlaß einer Lesung von Hans G. Helms" ["Presuppositions: On the Occasion of a Reading by Hans G. Helms"] on 27 October 1960. As the title indicates, Adorno read his response to the work out loud on the same occasion that Helms performed the musical poem. Adorno offered both a philosophical mediation of Helms' work and, perhaps more revealingly, a critique of Joyce's techniques by contrasting them against Helms' technique. To bring out the ramifications of Adorno's reading of *Finnegans Wake* in this speech, we can now turn to Adorno's talk itself.

**3. Adorno's Indirect Reading of *Finnegans Wake***

Having established the background of Helms' *Finnegans Wake*-inspired musical poem, we can now turn to Adorno's paper on *Fa:m' Ahniesgwow* and unpack how he uses Helms' work as a vehicle for critiquing and surpassing Joyce's novel in an indirect reading. Having performed "Presuppositions" ["Vorraussetzungen"] as a talk to support Helms in his creative endeavour, Adorno decided to try and get the piece of literary criticism published in print. In a letter from 3 January 1961, Adorno tells Helms that he is embarrassed to reply because he cannot include "Presuppositions" in his upcoming second volume of *Notes to Literature* as he was planning to do. Instead, Adorno explains: "I have now given "Voraussetzungen" to Höllerer for *Akzente*, who, as you will remember, already asked me for it in Cologne [.]" ["*Ich habe nun die* "*Voraussetzungen*" *Höllerer für die Akzente gegeben, der mich ja, wie Sie sich erinnern werden, schon in Köln darum bat* [.]"] (TWAA 588/70). Adorno's decision to pass his paper to Walter Höllerer was more successful than his first plan. Höllerer gratefully published the piece in his literary magazine *Akzente* in 1961. However, Adorno eventually managed to fulfil his first promise to his student when he had "Presuppositions" published

in the third volume of *Noten zur Literature* a few years later in 1965. What is particularly striking about this piece of literary criticism is that, although its title suggests that it is about Helms and his poem, in reality it tells us more about James Joyce. Adorno is especially taken with the *Wake*'s influence on Helms' work, perhaps to the point that he takes the Joycean connection so far that it prevents us from learning much information about *Fa:m' Ahniesgwow*. In short, "Presuppositions" should be understood less as an analysis of Helms' piece than as a comparison of Joyce and Helms. Adorno's approach in this essay, which rather unsurprisingly eschews the content of Helms' piece for a general discussion of its techniques, nevertheless illuminates how Adorno's mediated reading of Joyce operates. In this instance, he uses a Joycean poetic-musical adaptation as a prism with which to look beyond the modernist techniques in *Ulysses* that he had defended just two years previously.

At the start of "Presuppositions", Adorno outlines what is his strangely distanced approach to analysing Helms' creative work. Adorno declares that "I cannot claim here that I will facilitate the understanding of the text *Fa:m' Ahniesgwow* by interpreting it." (*NTL2* 95). As he continues: "The harsh light of unintelligibility that such a work turns toward the reader renders the usual intelligibility suspect as being shallow, habitual, reified – in short preartistic. To translate what appears alien in qualitatively modern works into current concepts and contexts is something of a betrayal of the works themselves." (95). Like his discussion of how modernist works such as *Ulysses* disrupt the idea of a reality that is in fact reified and taken for granted in realism, Adorno is advancing the idea that it is precisely the "shock" of the unintelligible that makes a literary work like Helms' critical (95). Again, this idea is not surprising. Adorno's fear of making *Fa:m'* understandable (or taming it through the dominating act of interpretation that would go against that very resistant impetus) is grounded in his general objection to reification, or forcing an object that is unwieldy and rebellious into a concept. However, Adorno's refusal to interpret Helms is ultimately quite strange because it is inconsistent with much of his other literary criticism. Take, for example, his approach to Dickens in the previous chapter. Whilst Adorno was emphatic that the allegorical reading of the *Old Curiosity Shop* would prevent its critical, resistant qualities from being dissolved into neat conceptual prisons, he did interpret Dickens' novel and its content. And, as we will see in the following chapters, he interpreted extracts from Beckett's and Huxley's works. And yet this inconsistency in his so-called

analysis of Helms - with its lack of quotation from the text, its lack of textual analysis, and, if we believe Adorno, its inability to be fully interpreted – actually helps to explain Adorno's particularly *secondary* approach to reading Joyce. The title "Presuppositions" is revealed by Adorno to be the descriptor for a less instrumentalised type of literary analysis that does not try to master the text with "critical" or "assenting judgements", but merely desires "to discuss some presuppositions." (96).

Adorno begins his comparison of Joyce and Helms by outlining what he sees as the strength of Joyce's work: how it critically navigates a dualistic conception of language. Adorno criticises "anyone who still relied blindly on the double character of language of sign and expression as though it were something god-given [as he] would himself become a victim of mere communication." (*NTL2* 99). In step with his understanding of reification in the previous chapter, Adorno attacks a conception of language that sees the sign as something that inherently refers to, represents and even gives meaning to the object, or the signified – for example, the idea that words give meaning to sounds. Whilst Adorno is against the use of concepts to place a stranglehold on expression, he also holds that "linguistic expressionism" cannot be totally divorced from concepts. He adds that choosing one pole of this "double character of language" over the other is equally inadequate. He criticises those who centre a communicative understanding of languages to the detriment of expression (i.e. seeing signs as giving meaning to objects), or those on the opposite side who advocate for pure expressionism (i.e. a position that resists recognising that language has conceptual elements that cannot be shaken off) (99). Adorno counters that Joyce offers a more sophisticated, third way:

> James Joyce's two epic works form the line of demarcation. Joyce fuses the aim of a language rigorously organised within the interior of the work of art on the one hand - and it was this interior space, not psychological inwardness, that was the legitimate idea of the *monologue intérieur* - with great epic on the other, the impulse to hold fast to the content that is transcendent to art, the content through which it becomes art, even with in the work's tightly sealed immanence. (99-100).

To an extent, Adorno's comment that *monologue intérieur* does not refer to psychological inwardness pushes against his readings of the technique as a subjective, psychological one in his earlier essays on

Joyce. Yet this quotation should be taken as mapping Adorno's notion of art and society's dialectical relationship onto language. Adorno suggests that Joycean language succeeds because it operates within and respects the immanent, autonomous space of art beyond the determination of society's concepts, a quality which, in turn, dialectically reflects society and what is beyond art.[126] Adorno's judgement that Joyce "brought [communication and expression] to a truce constitutes his extraordinary status, the high point between two impossibilities, that of the novel today and that of literature as pure sound" echoes his view of modernism as that which managed to successfully mediate what falls out of a "realistic", or perhaps discursive narrative, whilst nevertheless successfully depicting that free, "pure sound" within the physical form of the text (100).

However, as we follow the logic of the argument in "Presuppositions", we find that Adorno ultimately concludes that Joyce's approach to language is dissatisfactory. Despite Adorno's initial comments that Joyce offers a mediation between discursive language and pure sound, we see that Adorno did not completely buy into this assessment. Adorno goes back on his word, declaring to the reader:

> Joyce uses associations in the service of the tension between expression and meaning --- the association is attached to the meanings of words, for the most part isolated from their argumentative contexts, but it receives its substance from expression, particularly that of what is unconscious. In the long run, however, it is impossible not to see that there is something inadequate in this solution. [Joyce] deals less cautiously with empirical reality. He stretches the associations out so far that they become emancipated from discursive meaning. He has a price to pay for that: the association is not always clearly necessary; often it remains contingent, like its substratum, the psychology of the individual. (*NTL2* 102)

Adorno is interpreting Joyce's technique of interior monologue through the prism of specifically *Freudian* "associations". Not only does he read Joyce's movement through disparate linguistic parts as reflecting the connections made between disparate images in the psychoanalytic process, but

[126] See Adorno's comments on how art reflects reality via subjectification in "Presuppositions" (*NTL2* 100).

Adorno also interprets the monologue as a vehicle of subjective, unconscious thoughts. Adorno's criticism of Joyce's apparent break from discursivity here demonstrates an ambivalence about what he earlier regarded as a strength. Adorno makes this move to suggest that Joyce often clumsily privileges expression to the point that he omits the important role of discursivity in language. As we can see from the quote above, Adorno often accused Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* of reducing language dangerously to pure sound. We can unpack exactly how Adorno is using the term "pure sound" in this essay by turning to his comments on Joyce in "Trying to Understand Endgame". In that piece, Adorno holds that *Finnegans Wake* was "trying to liquidate the discursive element in language through pure sound". (*NTL1* 262). That Adorno is reading the *Wake* in "Presuppositions" through his Beckett piece is confirmed in an unpublished letter written to Helms in the lead up to Adorno's lecture on *Fa:m' Ahniesgwow*. In a letter from 12 September 1960, Adorno explained to Helms that he had not yet finished his "Presuppositions" lecture because he was in the process of finishing his essay on Beckett. Adorno justifies working on these two drafts in this order because: "the Beckett work will clarify certain points that I can then bring as a kind of dowry into the "Presuppositions" [essay]" ["*die Beckettarbeit gewisse Punkte klären wird, die ich dann gewissermaßen als Mitgift in die* "*Voraussetzungen*" *einbringen kann*."] (TWAA 588/64). We can see in these two essays that Adorno was contextualising Joyce's approach to language within the tradition of sound poetry (or "*Lautpoesie*" as it is referred to in German) practised by the likes of Christian Morgenster, Hugo Ball and Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, a form of poetry that privileged expression and phonetic sound over discursive meaning.

Adorno then advances his theory that Helms' linguistic technique is more sophisticated than Joyce's because it balances its expressive language *with* discursive language:

> While Joyce already uses different configurations and layers in different parts of his work, degrees of discursiveness that are balanced against one another, in Helms such previously desultory structural elements become dominant. The whole is composed in structures, put together in each case from a series of dimensions, or, in the terminology of serial music, parameters, that appear autonomously, or combined, or ordered hierarchically. […] [*Fa:m'*

> *Ahniesgwow's*] continuum extends from quasi-narrative portions intelligible on the surface to parts in which the phonetic values, the pure expressive qualities, completely outweigh the semantic values, the meanings. (*NTL2* 104).

Although there is a clear weakness in the fact that Adorno treats them as one and the same, the above quotation demonstrates that he conflates "structural elements" ["*Strukturelemente"*] with "discursiveness" ["*Diskursivität*"] as that which gives order or meaning to mere expression (*Noten* 441).[127] Here, Adorno is grounding his reading of Helms' language in an argument that split members of the Darmstadt School; whilst composers such as John Cage argued for the centrality of chance in his art, figures such as Boulez countered that there should remain a sense of choice in the work.[128] Adorno argues that Helms' language finds a balance between both experimentation and organisational structure. On the one hand, the "quasi-narrative portions" are what Adorno describes elsewhere in 'Presuppositions' as the poem's "plot": "the erotic scenes between Michael and Helène" (*NTL2* 108). On the other hand, Adorno also acknowledges the moments in the poem that actively marginalise the storyline and resist meaning, such as the following extract from the opening of *Fa:m' Ahniesgwow*: "herrrr--: nuja bittischeen ei'-danküfiil – pflegeh. . .." (Helms n.p. *Fa:m'* qtd. in Bruns 230). Adorno's argument that Joyce has *some* structures and discursivity in his novels exposes the fact that Helms lifted more than the technique of reducing language into pure sound from his literary hero. For example, we might think of the aesthetically distinct parts of *Ulysses* that are ordered into chapters. Or we might think of the overall cyclical structure of *Finnegans Wake* as a book with "Doublends Jined" (Joyce 14). Seasoned readers of Joyce would note that the contrast between the overarching story of Helène and Michael's relationship and the phonetic experiments that dominate the reader's (or listener's) experience of the text directly imitates a core tension in the *Wake*: between the plot and its language play. On the level of plot, Joyce's *Wake* offers characters (if they can even be called that)

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[127] Curiously, Adorno is reading Helms's work as a kind of montage. However, he is not interpreting it as a fragmentary montage (in the manner that he interpreted Joyce's *Ulysses*), but is interpreting it as the kind of vague, unifying montage that he would go on to describe in *Aesthetic Theory*: "the aesthetic principle of construction, the blunt primacy of a planned whole over the details and their interconnection in the microstructure" (155).

[128] Adorno indicates that he is thinking about this debate in "Presuppositions" when he comments: "The composer Ligeti may have been thinking of this when he pointed out the dialectical reversal of total determination and total contingency in music." (*NTL2* 106).

such as H.C.E., A.L.P. and their children. And yet these characters dip in and out of the novel, often elude understanding, or demand interpretation in order to be recovered by the reader. Indeed, these figures often play second fiddle to the infamous babbling of the *Wake,* a book which is often more explicit with its phonetics than its semantics. In light of Joyce's oscillation between affirming and negating a perceptible plot to his final novel, we can see how Adorno's concession attempts to suggest that, at the very least, Helms balances his work's discursivity more forcefully and successfully against his expression than Joyce does.

For Adorno, what is lacking in Joyce and present in Helms is a critical *antinomy* between expression and meaning: "The conflict between expression and meaning in language is not, as with the Dadaists, simply decided in favour of expression. It is respected as an antinomy." (*NTL2* 104). If we recall Adorno's response to the early draft of Helms' *Imre Ahniesgwow*, we will remember that his sole piece of feedback was the question of whether the tension between the work's "artistic impulse" and its "system" might be charitably read as an "antinomy" (TWAA 588/46). We can see that Adorno has decided to read Helms' final piece *Fa:m'* as a successful antinomy between the opposed elements of expression and discursivity. For instance, his essay is quite clear that he interprets the piece's spoken and musical sounds as existing in tension with Helms' microstructures, microstructures and the narrative meaning assigned to those very sounds. Whilst Adorno's interpretation that Joyce's language "simply decided in favour of expressionism" is an unfaithful reading of the *Wake*, it is useful to see that Adorno is setting Joyce up as a foil with which to contrast (and therefore celebrate) Helms' work as a:

> broken medium that does not fuse expression and meaning, does not integrate the one with the other by sacrificing it but instead drives both to unreconciled difference, becomes the bearer of the substance of what is broken and distant from meaning. […] It expresses meaning through its ascetic stance toward meaning. (*NTL2* 108).

Adorno takes his definition of modernist literature in the Expressionist Debate as that which "expresses meaning through its ascetic stance toward meaning" and gives it an important qualification: he argues that art cannot merely express meaning by negating discursivity or, indeed,

the idea of meaning wholesale, but can only do so by maintaining a dialectical relationship with meaning (i.e. making a negation of the negation).

Adorno's judgement of Joyce as a writer whose novels leaned towards pure sound is an unfaithful reading of Joyce's language and interior monologue. First, his view that Helms has significantly adapted Joycean language is one of the less convincing arguments in "Presuppositions". It would be wrong to suggest that Joyce's *Wake* is anything but a philologically ambitious project that drew upon approximately two times more languages than Helms did for his piece. Additionally, as we stated in the previous section, Helms' wordplay (and the philosophy behind it) is self-consciously lifted from Joyce. The title *Fa:m' Ahniesgwow* is a nod to the title of *Finnegans Wake*; the otherwise difficult or even impossible word to pronounce still retains "F" and "w" as its first and final letter in a distorted yet still perceptible allusion. Furthermore, in his gesture to the limited "meaning" that the wordplay takes on in Joyce's interior monologue, it is Adorno himself who wilfully marginalises the wider, contextual dimension of Joyce's language in favour of focusing on its expression.[129] It is easy to take an extract from *Finnegans Wake* such as "Brékkek Kékkek Kékkek Kékkek! Kóax Kóax Kóax!" and dismiss it as pure sound (Joyce 4). But this reading on its own would ignore the fact that this passage makes an intertextual reference to the onomatopoeic sound of frogs in Aristophanes' comedy *The Frogs.* That Joyce has deliberately placed an allusion to a Greek play shows that these sounds are not just here by chance but are referring to something beyond the sounds themselves. Indeed, Geert Lernout's account of Joyce's composition of the chapter that contains this extract reinforces the meticulous character of Joyce's process of writing the *Wake*, with its "sporadic but deliberate elaboration." (34).[130]

[129] Adorno is at pains to state that he is not completely damning Joyce's method here: "Sometimes it works, sometimes not. With heroic efforts, [Joyce takes] on this risk." (*NTL2* 102). But this qualification does not excuse Adorno from what is in practice a false dichotomy.

[130] Indeed, in "The Beginning: Chapter I.1", Geert Lernout says of Chapter I.1: "The first chapter of what was still called *Work in Progress* was conceived and written relatively late, at a time of crisis for the whole project. Joyce used Miss Weaver's order to create an overture that not only introduced all the major characters but linked his main hero […] to the Irish mythic hero Finn MacCool and to the Irish American Tim Finnegan." (64). Lernout's description of the conception of the first chapter characterises it as a piece that helped Joyce to create a coherent narrative rather than a mess of random associations.

Similarly, Adorno's interpretation of the Joycean interior monologue as a random, subjective string of Freudian associations leaves out the discursive elements that the narrative ushers towards. For instance, take the ever-shifting rumour at the centre of *Finnegans Wake*. At one point, the rumour being circulated is that the novel's 'protagonist' Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker (H.C.E.) has committed an act of sexual assault against two girls in Dublin's Phoenix Park: "of having behaved with ongentilmensky immodus opposite a pair of dainty maidservants in the swoolth of the rushy hollow whither" (Joyce, *Finnegans* 34). This is not to say that Adorno's psychoanalytic interpretation of Joyce's technique is necessarily invalid or even unusual. Adorno was not the only scholar who interpreted *Finnegans Wake*'s narrative as a parody of Freudian dreamwork – indeed, this psychoanalytical interpretation of the interior monologue's subjective and unconscious qualities had already been established by the likes of Frederick J. Hoffman in *Freudianism and the Literary Mind* [1945].[131] But Adorno's highly mediated approach to reading Joyce's novels entails that he ignores the details that might contradict his argument. For instance, he omits the overarching structures that Joyce uses to order his book, whether the haunting presence of H.C.E. and A.L.P. or the structuring presence of the rumour itself. He also omits the book's capacity to use gossip as a simultaneously hidden yet discursive tool. In this extract, gossip is used to shine a light on what are otherwise suppressed stories about sexual violence.

The most striking aspect of Adorno's unfaithful reading of the interior monologue and language in *Finnegans Wake* is that it seems to replicate many of Lukács' complaints about *Ulysses* in the Expressionist Debate. For example, Adorno's view that the *Wake*'s Lewis Carroll-inspired nonsense verse cannot comment on society because it shirks discursive meaning sits awkwardly next to his defence of *Ulysses'* modernism in "Extorted Reconciliation" just two years earlier. If we recall his argument in that essay, Adorno insisted that critical, modernist works comment on society precisely through their formalist refusal to depict society. It is therefore curious that Adorno would critique an expressionist form of language and refuse to see how it could dialectically reflect a real-

[131] See Hoffman's comment that: "The purpose of *Finnegans Wake* is clearly to render dream-life into words. […] Puns and portmanteau words are not strangers to the dream as Freud has abundantly shown; they constitute one of Joyce's chief devices." (142).

life context beyond itself. Adorno's psychoanalytic reading of Joyce's interior monologue (and its language) not only accords with Bloch's interpretation of the Joycean narrative as a Surrealist montage, but also resembles Lukács' unfaithful, critical distortion of Bloch's reading. For instance, Adorno's reading of the *Wake*'s narrative as a string of random associations accords with Lukács' interpretation of *Ulysses* as both unacceptably subjective and a mess of fragments that refuses to reflect objective reality in its autonomy. As we noted above, Adorno's presentation of the text's narrative as essentially a product of chance words dropped together might capture some of Joyce's playfulness with his creative construction, but it ignores the very deliberate arrangement and curation that Joyce employed in his writing practice, and therefore any historical content or context that Lukács suggested was lacking in Joyce's conception. We end up with an unfaithful reading by Adorno that seems to turn its back on Joyce and any faith in his work's negative representational qualities.

However, Adorno insists that he is not turning his back on Joyce's critical spirit but is ensuring its continuation. As well as highlighting the differences between Helms and Joyce, Adorno also points out what Helms' musical-poem inherits from Joyce's novel: "He takes an interest in Joyce similar to the interest that serial music and theory, to which he is close, take in free atonality and twelve-tone technique. It is obvious that *Fa:m' Ahniesgwow* is descended from *Finnegans Wake.* Helms makes no attempt to conceal that; nowadays the only place tradition has is in advanced works." (*NTL2* 103). Disregarding Adorno's double standard towards Joyce's and Helms' respective literary-musical techniques, Adorno's notion that the "only place tradition has is in advanced works" is a dialectical construction that attempts to go beyond Joyce but, crucially, does not disregard him.[132] This construction anticipates his point that Helms' linguistic technique transgresses what he sees as the inadequacies of Joyce's apparently extreme expressionist approach to narrative and language: "If I may speak in terms of literary history, it aims at something like a Joyce come into his own, self-conscious, consistent, and fully organised. Certainly, Helms would be the last to claim that he had

[132] Adorno's analysis of the writers' respective transformations of literature into music is inconsistent. Adorno criticises Joyce for allegedly turning language into pure sound, praising the writer where he refuses to conflate the literary with the musical (*NTL2* 100). Meanwhile, as his comparison of *Fa:m' Ahniesgwow* with serial music indicates, he actively encourages the literary-musical aspect of Helms' work.

surpassed Joyce or, as the popular but revolting word has it, 'overcome' him." (106).[133] Although Adorno pushes this apparently crude idea on behalf of Helms, it is also important to understand how exactly Adorno characterises this overcoming – that Helms' adaptation is not about completely omitting Joyce from the picture, but about becoming a "Joyce come into his own".

Adorno's reading of *Finnegans Wake* argues that Helms' adaptation of Joyce rescues and revitalises the once critical, modernist quality that he drew upon in Joyce's works.[134] Adorno was anxious that the repetition of previously critical techniques might cause these very techniques to become reified. Adorno puts this idea most clearly in *Aesthetic Theory,* where he argues:

> *Nouveauté* is aesthetically the result of historical development, the trademark of consumer goods appropriated by art by means of which artworks distinguish themselves from the ever-same inventory in obedience to the need for the exploitation of capital, which, if it does not expand, if it does not - in its own language - offer something new, is eclipsed. (21).

Here, Adorno inverts the idea that capitalism forces its logic onto objects. He argues that art itself appropriates the fetishism of the "new" ("*Nouveauté*") under capitalism with the birth of intellectual property. For Adorno, when a certain modernist technique is constantly repeated in art or literature, it loses this quality of "shock" (*NTL2* 95). True to his formalist leanings, Adorno considers "shock" to be the resistant quality that is needed to keep art genuinely experimental, innovative and critical to avoid becoming stale and, subsequently, engulfed by the "ever-same" logic of capitalism (95). Adorno praises Helms for moving away from what he considers to be the institutionalisation of Joyce and his literary techniques. And yet his idea of a "Joyce come into his own" reveals that Adorno still recognises Joyce as a writer whose work was once critically autonomous, representing social reality through techniques that established their distance from that social reality. Adorno's earlier essays on

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[133] Adorno does consider the counter argument to his claim that Helms has improved upon Joyce's technique: "It is valid to ask, however, whether progress in the mastery of material is not bought at too high a price; whether the authenticity of Schonberg or Joyce does not stem precisely from the tension between their substance, which has not fully coalesced, and their material and technique." (*NTL2* 107).

[134] See Adorno's comment in *Aesthetic Theory* that: "However much works are distinguished from each other by their quality, they are at the same time incommensurable. They communicate with each other exclusively by way of antitheses: 'Every work is the mortal enemy of the other.' They become comparable only by annihilating themselves, by realising their life through their mortality." (211).

*Ulysses* demonstrate that he understood that Joyce had to resort to an expressionist technique in reaction to a literary ideology that privileged a narrow, realist form of literature. In "Presuppositions", Adorno is arguing that Joyce's particular approach will no longer do. He advances the idea that Helms adapts and uses *Finnegans Wake* as a springboard to create a new, effective modernist form that reflects the alienation of post-war society in a way that rewrites the old distinctions of the Expressionist Debate, whilst still honouring what he saw as the "critical impulse" he glimpsed in Joyce's work when he defended the author in 1958. In this way, Adorno ends up dwelling on the critical potential of *Joycean* literature rather than Joyce's literature directly.[135]

[135] Various figures in Germanophone literary circles flirted with the idea that they could become the German Joyce or write the German *Ulysses.* The text that has often been described as the German *Ulysses* is Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* [1929], but Hermann Broch and Arno Schmidt are also known to have Joycean elements to their work. See Robert K. Weninger's *The German Joyce* [2012] for an overview of Joyce's influence on Germanophone writers.

# Chapter 3 - Adorno and Beckett: A Therapeutic Reading

On 28 November 1958, Theodor Adorno and Samuel Beckett met in person for the very first time. In his sixth lecture on *Aesthetics* just days later, Adorno told his students about this event:

> I would say […] that, in the current situation, the task of art as such is almost entirely to express what has been damaged, or – as Samuel Beckett said to me barely a week ago – to express the powerless and oppressed parts of humans ["*das zum Ausdruck zu bringen, was an den Menschen ohnmächtig und unterdrückt ist*"], not the power and glory with which, at least on the surface, official and officially recognised art has usually occupied itself. (*Aesthetics* 71 and *Ästhetik* 89).

The anecdote reveals the esteem Adorno held Beckett in. He repeatedly casts Beckett as one of the most important modernist writers who wrote in English (and French – but more on that later), treating his writing as the exemplification of the critical literary aesthetic that would point out and resist false consciousness. Through a psychoanalytic (and, strikingly, humanistic) language of expressing what is "powerless and oppressed in humans", Adorno offers Beckett as the writer whose art can genuinely represent and even recuperate what had been traumatised, dominated and neglected in society.[136] This chapter argues that Adorno imputed a therapeutic value to Beckett's works. Partly by eschewing glib versions of consolation and reductive forms of psychoanalysis, Beckett provides to Adorno some means of coming to terms with the horrors of World War Two.

Beckett is one of the most frequently discussed Anglophone writers in Adorno's oeuvre. Adorno references Beckett in the notes to his German copy of *Endgame* ("Notes on Beckett" 158-71), "Extorted Reconciliation" [1958] (*NTL1* 221, 225-26, 231), "Trying to Understand Endgame" [1958] (*NTL1* 241-75), *Aesthetics* [1958/9] (54, 79, 109), *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* [1959] (20), "Presuppositions" [1961] (*NTL2* 107), "Titles" [1962] (*NTL2* 4), "Commitment" [1962] (*NTL2* 90), his notes on *The Unnamable* [1962] ("Notes on Beckett" 172-78), "Parataxis" [1963] (*NTL2* 137), *History and Freedom* [1964/5] (57), *Metaphysics: Concepts and Problems* [1965] (114, 117-18, 124,

[136] The English in this sentence is my translation.

135-36), *Lectures on Negative Dialectics* [1965/6] (176), *Negative Dialectics* [1966] (204, 223, 362, 367-68, 380-81), "Charmed Language" [1967] (*NTL2* 196), "An Open Letter to Rolf Hochhuth" [1967] (*NTL2* 243), "Is Art Lighthearted?" [1967] (*NTL2* 248, 252-53), the transcription of his television debate on Beckett [1968] (*Frankfurter* 78-122) and *Aesthetic Theory* [1970] (16, 20, 27, 30-32, 46, 79, 81-82, 92, 128, 133-35, 147, 153-54, 198, 219, 224, 234, 249-50, 271, 302, 317-18, 320, 322, 340, 347, 366, 370). In his writings, Adorno demonstrated an awareness of *Waiting for Godot* [1952/4] (*AT* 30, 250, 340), *Endgame* [1957] (*NTL1* 241-76), *La Dernière Bande* [*Krapp's Last Tape*] [1959] ("Notes on Beckett" 174), *The Unnamable* (*NTL2* 90), *Happy Days* [1961/3] (*AT* 82), and *Film* [1965] and *Comédie* [*Play*] [1966] (*Frankfurter* 78-122). Adorno also owned books by Beckett in English and French, as well as works in German translation. In his library, Adorno owned two English-language works that had dedications from Beckett dated 1957. The first text was an edition of Beckett's novel *From an Abandoned Work* that was published by Faber in 1958, whilst the second was an edition of Beckett's essay *Proust* that was published by Grove Press in 1957. Adorno's library holds three of Beckett's Francophone texts that were all published by Minuit in Paris; Adorno owned a copy of *L'Innommable* that was published in 1953 (with sections underlined by Adorno), a copy of *Comment C'est* that was published in 1961 (with a dedication from Beckett dated 1961), as well as a copy of *Nouvelles et Textes Pour Rien* that was published in 1958. Adorno's library also contains some copies of Beckett's work in German translation that were published by Suhrkamp Verlag. Whilst his German edition of *Film/Eh Joe* (published in 1968 as *Film/He Joe*) does not seem to have been marked, both Adorno's 1957 copy of the works *Endspiel/Alle, die da fallen* [*Endgame/All That Fall*] and his 1959 copy of *Der Namenlose* [*The Unnamable*] contain underlined sections, marks, marginalia and notes. His library also holds at least six German-language collections of (radio) plays published by Suhrkamp that include works by Beckett.[137] Adorno owned an Italian collection of

[137] These texts include: *Endspiel* in *Sechs moderne Theaterstücke: Beckett, Brecht, Dürrenmatt, Frisch, Jahn, Majakowski* [1959], *Das letzte Band* [*Krapp's Last Tape*] in *Sieben moderne Theaterstücke: Audiberti, Beckett, Brecht, Eliot, Lorca, MacLeish, O'Neill* [1960], *Glückliche Tage* [*Happy Days*] in *Sechs moderne Theaterstücke: Beckett, Brecht, Frisch, Ionesco, Nelly Sachs, Thomas* [1962], *Spiel* [*Play*] in *Sieben moderne Theaterstücke: Beckett, Brecht, Camus, Hildesheimer, Michelsen, O'Casey, Pirandello* [1963], *Cascando* in *Brecht, MacLeish, Dürrenmatt, Herbert, Frisch, Camus, Andersch, Yacine, Eich, Harube, Bachmann, Dagerman, Weiss, Compton, Walser, Pinter, Konstantinović, Hildesheimer, Pinget, Beckett* [1963], and

Beckett's poetry entitled *Poesie in Inglese* [1964] as well as an edition of Octavio Paz's collection *Anthology of Mexican Poetry* from 1958 that was translated by Beckett into English. Finally, Adorno owned several pieces of secondary criticism on Beckett in German.[138]

Adorno's interest in Beckett is well known and well documented almost to the point of exhaustion. His celebrated essay "Trying to Understand Endgame" [1958] – a text which begins with a dedication "To S.B." - has become one of the definitive texts of Beckettian Studies (*NTLI* 241). Some of the most extensive and incisive studies on Adorno and Beckett include works by the Beckett scholars David Cunningham, Simon Critchley, Dirk Van Hulle, W. Martin Lüdke, Nigel Mapp, James McNaughton, Andrea Oppo, Jean-Michel Rabaté, Laura Salisbury, Shane Weller and, more recently, Natalie Leeder in her monograph *Freedom and Negativity in Adorno and Beckett* [2017].[139] Adorno Studies has a correspondingly rich tradition of scholarship on these two figures. For instance, various Adornian scholars have contextualised and illuminated Beckett's centrality in Adorno's theory of modernism, including: J. M. Bernstein, Hauke Brunkhorst, Deborah Cook, Peter E. Gordon, Espen Hammer, James Martin Harding, Gillian Rose and Lambert Zuidervaart.

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*Kommen und Gehen* [*Come and Go*] in *Sieben moderne Theaterstücke: Beckett, Duras, Mrozek, Shaw, Sperr, Sternheim, Weiss* [1966].

[138] These works include Friedrich Hansen-Löve's *Samuel Beckett oder die Einübung ins Nichts* [1957], Marianne Kesting's *Das Romanwerk Samuel Becketts* [1958] (with markings and marginalia by Adorno), *Becketts Spiel: Über das absurde Theater* [1966] and Ulf Schramm's *Fiktion und Reflexion: Überlegungen zu Musil und Beckett* [1967].

[139] For a more detailed list of some of the most insightful pieces of scholarship on Adorno and Beckett, please see the following: Martin Lüdke*'s Anmerkungen zu einer Logik des Zerfalls: Adorno – Beckett* [1981] (101), Gillian Rose's *The Melancholy Science* [1978] (129-30), J. M. Bernstein's "Philosophy's Refuge: Adorno in Beckett" [1990] (177-91), Lambert Zuidervaart's *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory* [1991] (152–60), Simon Critchley's *Very Little-- Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature* [1997] (172-87), James Martin Harding's *Adorno and 'A Writing of the Ruins'* [1997] (51), Hauke Brunkhorst's "Irreconcilable Modernity" [1997] (43-61), David Cunningham's "Trying (Not) to Understand: Adorno and the work of Beckett" [2002] (125-39), James Phillips' article "Beckett's Boredom and the Spirit of Adorno" [2004] (251-60), Matthew Holt's article "Catastrophe, Autonomy and the Future of Modernism: Trying to Understand Adorno's Reading of Endgame" [2004] (261-79), Chris Conti's article "Critique and Form: Adorno on Godot and Endgame" [2004] (277-92), Shane Weller's *A Taste for the Negative: Beckett and Nihilism* [2005] (5-198), Nigel Mapp's "No Nature, No Nothing: Adorno, Beckett, Disenchantment" [2006] (159-70), Andrea Oppo's *Philosophical Aesthetics and Samuel Beckett* [2008] (85-148), Jean-Michel Rabaté's "Philosophising with Beckett" [2010] (91-117), Dirk Van Hulle's "Adorno's Notes on Endgame" [2010] (196-217), Deborah Cook's "The Rise and Decline of the Individual: Exit Hamlet, Enter Hamm" [2011] (227-33), Laura Salisbury's *Samuel Beckett: Laughing Matters, Comic Timing* [2012] (1-233), Michelle Rada's article "The Illusionless: Adorno and the Afterlife of Laughter in How It Is" [2015] (150-67), Espen Hammer's *Adorno's Modernism* [2015] (132-55), Natalie Leeder's *Freedom and Negativity in Beckett and Adorno* [2017] (1-236), Rabaté's *Think, Pig!: Beckett at the Limit of the Human* [2016] (134-57) and James McNaughton's *Samuel Beckett and the Politics of Aftermath* [2018] (5-194).

Various critics have credited Adorno with setting the precedent for a common philosophical reading of the playwright in Beckett Studies; namely, that *Endgame* gives voice to the inability to represent or talk about the aftermath of World War Two (Critchley, *Very* 22; Morin 104; Weller, *A Taste* 14). Emilie Morin summarises this position well in *Beckett's Political Imagination* [2017], where she explains that: "[Adorno] concurred that Beckett's texts were written 'in the ashes of Auschwitz' – a view that Adorno had also developed in his own work, which draws attention to the capacity of Beckett's texts to represent the aftermath of the Holocaust through their very omission of clear historical landmarks." (130). Morin's analysis picks up on Adorno's view in *Negative Dialectics* that: "Beckett has given us the only fitting reaction to the situation of the concentration camps—a situation he never calls by name, as if it were subject to an image ban ["*Bilderverbot*"]." (382).[140] Adorno plays with a productive tension in his theory here, arguing that Beckett's works are especially fit for representing post-war society precisely because the broken worlds of his novels and plays refuse to represent society. Although Adorno's interpretation of Beckett in these terms is well known, we can reframe it as a distinctive example of where Adorno drew upon Anglophone literature to point out the false consciousness in contemporary society.

The cognitive and critical function that Adorno identifies in Beckett can also be transposed to a therapeutic context.[141] In Beckett Studies, works such as Deirdre Bair's *Samuel Beckett: A Biography* [1978] (348), Martha Nussbaum's *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* [1990] (304), Didier Anzieu's *Beckett* [1999] (118-19), Paul Sheehan's *Modernism, Narrative, and Humanism* [2002] (153), Spyridoula Athanasopoulou-Kypriou's article "Not I and/or the Art of Living" [2005] (311), Matthew Feldman's *Beckett's Books: A Cultural History of Samuel Beckett's 'Interwar Notes'* [2006] (79), Lois Oppenheim's works "Life as Trauma, Art as Mastery:

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[140] "*Beckett hat auf die Situation des Konzentrationslagers, die er nicht nennt, als lage uber ihr Bilderverbot, so reagiert, wie es allein ansteht*." (Adorno, *Negative Dialektik* 370).

[141] As we will soon see, my approach to Adorno's therapeutic interpretation of Beckett is not unlike the scholarship on the so-called 'humanist' Beckett. See Laura Salisbury's comments on the existential humanist interpretation of Beckett (that was proffered by scholars such as Richard Ellman) in her work *Samuel Beckett: Laughing Matters, Comic Timing* [2012] (5). As Salisbury's study has shown, various scholars have illustrated the argument that Beckett uses laughter to somehow redeem the plight of the human, including Ruby Cohn in *Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut* [1962] (287), Stanley E. Gontarski in *The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts* [1985] (87), Paul Sheehan in "A World Without Monsters: Beckett and the Ethics of Cruelty" [2008] (153), Simon Critchley's *On Humour* [2002] (105), and Michelle Rada in "The Illusionless" [2015] (151).

Samuel Beckett and the Urgency of Writing" [2008] (419) and "Re-visiting Stasis in the Work of Samuel Beckett" [2009] (127), Marx Nixon's *Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936–37* [2011] (47, 188), Rhys Tranter's "'Without Solution of Continuity': Beckett's 'That Time' and Trauma Memoir" [2015] (115), Gabriele Sofia's article "Biomécanique de l'attente: Implications cognitives dans la dramaturgie de Beckett" [2016] (272-85), Anna Sigg's thesis *Therapeutic Theatre: Trauma and Bodily Articulation in Post-war European Drama* [2016] (111) and James Gourley's "The Dialectic of Panic and Anxiety in Beckett's 'First Love'" [2017] (152) have already explored the different ways in which they consider Beckett to be a therapeutic writer.[142] I will be building upon this scholarship by assessing how Adorno offered a specific *psychoanalytic* reading of Beckett's literature as something that had a particular therapeutic quality that could voice and perhaps even begin to heal the physical and mental wounds in the aftermath of the war. Like his reading of Joyce in the previous chapter, it is important to note that Adorno's therapeutic interpretation of Beckett's work is something that the writer would not have necessarily advocated himself.[143] However, Adorno's reading of Beckett is perhaps not as tendentious as his reading of Joyce. Some of the more recent psychoanalytic scholarship on Beckett's therapy under Bion and his "Psychology Notes" has shown that Beckett exhibited some intellectual interest in psychoanalysis.[144] Beckett's writing also shows some glimpses of a muted optimism that one might be able to come to terms with the wounds of the Second World War. For example, in his report on an Irish hospital in the bombed-out city of Saint-Lô entitled "The Capital of the Ruins" [1946], Beckett wistfully considers the possibility that the Irish will develop: "a

[142] For instance, just as Bair argues that writing *Watt* was a "daily therapy" (348), Anzieu, Feldman and Nixon have all provided arguments that Beckett's act of writing was itself therapeutic. Spyridoula Athanasopoulou-Kypriou, Gabriele Sofia and Anna Sigg have suggested that Beckett's work has a therapeutic potential for its readers or audience.

[143] See the account of Adorno's reading of Hamm as Hamlet in the second section of this chapter.

[144] Some of the most important scholarship on the actual shape of Beckett's interest in psychoanalysis includes Matthew Feldman's article "Beckett's Poss and the Dog's Dinner: An Empirical Survey of the 1930s 'Psychology' and 'Philosophy Notes'" [2004], Angela Moorjani's chapter "Beckett and Psychoanalysis" [2004] (172-93), Matthijs Engelberts' *Notes Diverse Holo: Catalogues of Beckett's Reading Notes and Other Manuscripts at Trinity College Dublin*, *with Supporting Essays* [2006], Matthew Feldman's book *Beckett's Books: A Cultural History of the Interwar Notes* [2006], Elizabeth Barry's article "Introduction: Beckett, Language and the Mind" [2008] and the accompanying special issue of *Journal of Beckett Studies,* Steven Connor's article "Beckett and Bion" [2008] (9-34), and Joshua Powell's recent and extensive book *Samuel Beckett and Experimental Psychology: Perception, Attention, Imagery* [2020].

vision and sense of a time-honoured conception of humanity in ruins, and perhaps even an inkling of the terms in which our condition is to be thought again" (397).

Yet the existing scholarship has neglected a key Anglophone context behind Adorno's therapeutic reading of Beckett's work.[145] Of course, it may seem strange to think that Adorno would have understood Beckett as an *Anglophone* writer. Not only does Beckett's bilingualism mean that he is also known as a Francophone writer, but his popularity in Germany meant that he was also translated into German. Indeed, in Adorno's case he primarily interacted with Beckett in German and French; his essay and notes on *Endgame* were based on the German translation, whilst his notes on *The Unnamable* took quotations from the German translation and French version of the text.[146] But Adorno played with this tension, reading Beckett's work against an Anglophone psychoanalytic background. If we investigate why Adorno privileged Beckett's fiction for being especially able to represent the aftermath of war, we can see that Adorno's criticism of an American form of therapy informs his celebration of Beckett's writings. In *Adorno and Democracy: The American Years* [2016], Shannon Mariotti demonstrates that Adorno was critical of the psychological therapies in post-war America that arose and diverged from their European psychoanalytic roots (79). Just as Adorno criticised American therapies as a mockery of the talking cure, or a therapy that merely aided capitalist society's false consciousness, his reading of Beckett's texts suggests a way of resisting this disingenuous form of therapy.[147]

Adorno's critique of the American distortion of European psychoanalysis feeds his conviction that literature may possess a therapeutic value. He develops this idea by considering how Beckett's works combat false consciousness, taken by the idea that literature could uncover the non-identity between a sick world and a qualitatively better one. Adorno's literary analysis also applies his idea of false consciousness to therapy itself. In step with his analysis of the non-identity between the concept

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[145] Joshua Powell has recently noted Beckett's knowledge of behaviourism (181). However, he does not relate this point to Adorno's reading of the writer.

[146] That Adorno drew upon these particular translations is affirmed by the presence of the texts in his library. However, it should be highlighted that Beckett gifted two of his English texts to Adorno and that Beckett often wrote his correspondence to Adorno in English.

[147] See also Nico Israel's discussion of Adorno's comparison of European psychoanalysis with the Horney School in America in "Damage Control: Adorno, Los Angeles, and the Dislocation of Culture" [1997] (97-99).

and object that I discussed in "Chapter 1", Adorno's work on psychoanalytic therapies often expresses a disappointment with the state of therapy in his contemporary society, as well as its disjuncture with what he believes would constitute a more genuine therapy. In "Sociology and Psychology (Part II)" Adorno presents his idea of a *truly* therapeutic approach: "Psychoanalysis in its most authentic and by now already obsolete form comes into its own as a report on the forces of destruction rampant in the individual amidst a destructive society." (n.p.). Through Beckett's literature, Adorno wants to draw the analysand's attention to their sickness as deriving from a sick society in order to allow the individual to begin thinking about how a different, better society may be possible.

However, my analysis also takes into account the fact that Adorno and Beckett also had great reservations about psychoanalysis as a therapeutic enterprise. In "Sociology and Psychology (Part I)" [1967], Adorno argues that: "In adjusting to the mad whole the cured patient becomes really sick – which is not to imply that the uncured are any healthier." (n.p.). Adorno's observations in the first and second parts of "Sociology and Psychology" demonstrate that even at the end of his career, Adorno was skittish about the critical potential of even traditional forms of psychoanalysis. He remained sceptical of the idea of a 'cure' in capitalist society, especially if it merely ended up pathologising and tranquilising the questioning, rebellious individual (see the next chapter for a similar discussion on the Bokanovsky Process in *Brave New World*). Beckett's interest in psychoanalysis was also marked by his heavy skepticism. As he noted ruefully about his own therapeutic sessions with Bion: "how lost I would be bereft of my incapacitation" (*The Letters* 250). Moreover, his piece of reportage on the hospital in Saint-Lô is still tainted by the thought that therapy itself might not be the driver of the kind of introspection Beckett was hoping for: "the therapeutic relation faded to the merest of pretexts" ("The Capital" 395).

We should interpret Adorno's therapeutic reading of Beckett as a nervous psychoanalytic reading. For instance, take Adorno's following observation: "That psychology should have become sickness expresses not merely the false consciousness society has of itself but at the same time what has actually become of people in society." ("Sociology and Psychology Part I" n.p.).[148] Although

[148] As Adorno comments in *Aesthetic Theory*: "[In Beckett] a second world of images springs forth, both sad and rich, the concentrate of historical experiences that otherwise, in their immediacy, fail to articulate the

Adorno argues that therapy can perpetuate sickness, he suggests that the very failure of therapy as an "obsolete form" can "express" the false consciousness perpetuated by itself and society at large. Adorno approaches Beckett's texts in the same way: that they are therapeutic precisely in their failure to be so.[149]

Adorno therefore develops an idea of enacting a specific type of (failed) literary therapy through the act of reading Beckett's works. We will be focusing on Beckett's written word over his theatrical performances because Adorno focuses on the former (although Adorno does cover some of Beckett's works' theatrical elements such as their stage directions).[150] Adorno's most significant comments on Beckett come in the form of his notes on a copy of *Endgame,* his essay on *Endgame* and the notes on his copy of *Der Namenlose* that he intended to turn into an essay. Just as Beckett dramatises the conflict and relation between the mind and the body in his work, Adorno sees Beckett's writing as the "physiognomy ["*Physiognomik*"] of what is no longer human." (*NTL1* 254 and *Noten* 296). Adorno treats the body in Beckett as something that bears upon the mind, reading the bodies of Beckett's texts as objects that can name and negate false consciousness because they bear the physical and mental scars of events such as the Second World War.[151] Of course, Adorno's

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essential: the evisceration of subject and reality." (31). For further information on false consciousness in Adorno's work, see Nathan Ross' thoughts on Adorno, false consciousness and aesthetics in his article "On Truth Content and False Consciousness in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory" [2015] (269-90) and in his chapter "Aesthetic Truth as the Mimesis of False Consciousness in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory" in *The Philosophy and Politics of Aesthetic Experience* [2017] (193-232).

[149] A number of critics have already noted the idea that Beckett's therapy is a failed one – even to the extent that some of them suggest that the failed therapy has some use. For instance, Joseph H. Smith's work "Notes on Krapp, Endgame, and 'Applied' Psychoanalysis" [1991] argues that Beckett enacts a specifically "negative therapy" (202), Ewa Plonowska Ziarek's book *The Rhetoric of Failure Deconstruction of Skepticism, Reinvention of Modernism* [1995] argues that in *How It Is* "the monstrous scene of communication stages a violent, though no doubt 'therapeutic', attempt to mend the instabilities of discourse by overcoming the asymmetry between the self and the other" (180), Reza Habibi's article "Samuel Beckett's 'Psychology Notes' and The Unnamable" [2018] holds that *The Unnamable* outlines a "failed talking cure" (214), and Joshua Powell's book *Samuel Beckett and Experimental Psychology: Perception, Attention, Imagery* [2020] concludes that: "Working in a tradition that includes Arthur Schopenhauer and Sigmund Freud as well as a wide range of experimental and therapeutic psychologists, Beckett's experiments are concerned with the human's limited capacity to perceive, register and recall sensory stimuli." (180).

[150] As we will see as we go through this chapter, Adorno also focuses on Beckett's characters, their movements and their bodies. Indeed, Adorno's focus on how the body of Beckett's texts can tell us about the bodies in war demonstrates that he is still interested in the performative aspect of the written works.

[151] Beckett famously played with the relationship between mind and body in his literature. See Elizabeth Barry, Ulrika Maude and Laura Salisbury's "Introduction" to their special issue of the *Journal of Medical Humanities* entitled "Beckett, Medicine and the Brain" for a comprehensive summary of Beckett's and Beckett Studies' engagement with the theme of the mind-body relation (127-35). However, instead of invoking the kind of Cartesian divide that we see in Beckett's *Murphy* (171), I will be arguing that Adorno's rather Freudian view of

position is somewhat strained by the fact that being scarred or damaged does not necessarily make one better equipped to describe and negate false consciousness. Yet Adorno insists on treating Beckett's work in much the same way that he treated Joyce's *Ulysses*: as critically autonomous literature that could represent society precisely in its distinction from society. Adorno holds that Beckett's broken textual bodies can represent the broken bodies and minds of the Second World War in a way that directly 'representational' forms, from photography to reportage, cannot.[152]

Ultimately, this chapter will argue that Adorno was drawn to the way the bodies of Beckett's texts seem to speak of and challenge the false consciousness of post-war therapies. In other words, I hold that for Adorno, the self-awareness of psychoanalytic therapy's inadequacy to deal with the war's physical and mental trauma in Beckett's writing opens up the possibility of a *genuine* therapy. Adorno proposes that a genuine therapy will voice these otherwise repressed, unspeakable subjects and will question whether the society that inflicted and repressed this damage might be otherwise. To do this, I will examine Adorno's readings of Beckett's novel *The Unnamable* and his play *Endgame,* outlining the three stages that Adorno's reading of these works' therapeutic potential goes through.

In the first section, I discuss how Adorno appealed to Beckett's literature to talk about the false consciousness of post-war society. I begin by outlining how Adorno turned to Beckett's texts as therapeutic sites that would speak about the unspeakable aspects of the Second World War. My first interpretation demonstrates that Adorno performs a psychoanalytic reading which argues that Beckett's texts reflect the war's real lacerated bodies and minds because his writings are lacerated while remaining honest about their status as fiction. In the next section, I illustrate how Adorno problematises his initial position and ultimately casts his psychoanalytic interpretation of Beckett as a failure. I explore how Adorno concedes that psychoanalytic readings of literature are reductive, that Beckett's textual bodies could not represent the real bodies that are annihilated beyond repair, and that

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trauma – i.e. that the mind could be scarred in the same way as the body – informs his reading of Beckett's texts as bodies that are scarred by the mental and physical dropout of the war.

[152] My focus here has been anticipated by Matthias Benzer's article "Lifelong Death Penalty: Adorno, Beckett's Drama, Sociology" [2012]. Even though Benzer is ultimately interested in the sociological dimension of Adorno's readings of Beckett's literature rather than a strictly therapeutic one, he points to how Adorno draws on the dead bodies in Beckett's writings to point to the social conditions (i.e. reification) that underlines them (94-121).

these works do not have a strictly therapeutic capacity to counter the false consciousness of society at large. My third section examines Adorno's conclusion that it is this failure to be therapeutic that allows Beckett's work to reflect (and reflect upon) the physical and mental violence of the war. I show how Adorno's interpretation suggests that *The Unnamable*'s and *Endgame*'s textual wounds allow them to critically reflect upon the bad state of the therapeutic situation in contemporary society. Adorno's interpretation allows us to see how Beckett's work sensitises us to the difference between the inadequacies of therapy in its current form, the self-understanding of such therapy, and the idea of a genuine therapy in society.

By reading Adorno's engagement with Beckett through the theorist's attitude to the failures of Anglo-American therapy, I will offer a new way of conceptualising his well-established interest in this canonical Anglophone modernist writer.

**1. Adorno's Therapeutic Reading of Beckett**

It is likely that Adorno first read *The Unnamable* around 1962 "with pencil in hand, [annotating] his copy of Elmar Tophoven's German translation – *Der Namenlose* (1959) [.]" (Weller, "Notes" 180). Adorno's turn to Beckett's *The Unnamable* is underlined by his concern about his society's incapacity to talk about the violent events of the Second World War. Adorno's anxiety about false consciousness in the post-war era is evident in the essay "An Open Letter to Rolf Hochhuth" [1967], where he states:

> For the artist who can neither evade the most extreme situations nor give them artistic form, nothing remains but to begin with the victims, removing the depiction of them, however, so far from the familiar causal networks of everyday life that the most extreme things are illuminated in them without being thematised; it is almost as though a sense of modesty hesitates to name them. (*NTL2* 243-44).[153]

[153] "*Dem Künstler, der weder dem Äußersten sich entziehen kann noch es gestalten kann, bleibt wohl nichts übrig, als bei den Opfern anzusetzen, ihre Darstellung jedoch den gewohnten Wirkungszusammenhängen des mittleren Lebens so fern zu rücken, daß an ihnen das Äußerste aufginge, ohne daß es thematisch würde*." (Adorno, *Noten* 295).

Here, the "extreme situation" that Adorno is referring to is the Holocaust. Adorno's view that one could not avoid speaking of extreme situations immediately repeats his desire for a new moral horizon that he discussed in *Negative Dialectics*: "a new categorical imperative: [for humans] to arrange their thoughts and actions so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself." (365). Integrally, Adorno was worried that it might be too late to realise this "categorical imperative", that the aftermath of the war might be impossible to talk about. Not content with his famous adage in "Cultural Criticism and Society" [1951], that "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric", in 1966 Adorno questioned the notion of even *living* "after Auschwitz": "But it is not wrong to raise the less cultural question whether after Auschwitz you can go on living--especially whether one who escaped by accident, one who by rights should have been killed, may go on living." (*Prisms* 34 and *ND* 362-63). As this discussion of his own survivor's guilt attests, Adorno's discussion of false consciousness sometimes slips into deeply personal reflections. Whilst it is pertinent to avoid psychoanalysing Adorno, it is important to acknowledge the moments where his analysis of Beckett is affected by his own position as a German Jewish thinker – for example, when he uses Beckett's work to talk about the aftermath of the Holocaust and the representation of *Jewish* bodies in particular.

Adorno especially privileges Beckett's literature as the most appropriate domain in which to talk about the war. For example, in *Negative Dialectics,* Adorno makes the following staunch statement: "Beckett has given us the only fitting reaction to the situation of the concentration camps—a situation he never calls by name, as if it were subject to an image ban." (381-82). Adorno's description of Beckett's work through the exceptional language of the "only fitting reaction" is one of those moments in his theory where he privileges literature as a tool that is especially equipped for representing the reality of the twentieth-century catastrophe in a society that otherwise obscures that reality. Whilst Adorno would often turn to philosophy to address the ethical question of responding to the Holocaust (as is implied by using the phrase "categorical imperative" to describe the task of avoiding a second Auschwitz [365]), Adorno's readings of Beckett suggest that literature could also take on this task. Indeed, Adorno presents the bodies of Beckett's texts as domains that would

properly represent what has been repressed about the trauma of the Holocaust precisely because they tend to offer a form that is abstracted and deliberately detached from society.[154]

To an extent, Adorno's reading of *The Unnamable* reinforces his characterisation of Beckett's novel as a critically autonomous artwork. Adorno's discussion of the depiction of the Holocaust's victims in literature suggests that this depiction should be decontextualised, from his idea that one should "remove the depiction of [the Holocaust's victims]" from art, to his notion that any meaningful artistic depiction of the victims should "[hesitate] to name them" (*NTL2* 243-44). Adorno often pushed the view that any artistic confrontation with Auschwitz must omit any reference to it. This act of stripping-away the subject of a traumatic event is found in a passage that Adorno underlined in his copy of *The Unnamable*: "Nothing then but me, of which I know nothing, except that I have never uttered, and this black, of which I know nothing either, except that it is black, and empty." (Beckett 306). Here, a potentially fraught past event has been emptied out of any contextual detail. The narrator's characteristic ironic description of a subject that it apparently cannot remember (in this case, the "black") is nevertheless described through the language of *absence* as a "black and empty" abyss. Adorno's view that Beckett's literature approached the bodies of the victims via omission is even clearer in his essay on *Endgame*: "The violence of the unspeakable is mimicked by the timidity to mention it. Beckett keeps it nebulous. One can only speak euphemistically about what is incommensurate with all experience, just as one speaks in Germany of the murder of the Jews." (*NTL1* 246). He privileges Beckett's lack of confrontation with the bodies of the Holocaust's victims as an especially "fitting reaction" because it subjects itself to an image ban. Adorno's curious position dialectically reverses the idea that those who did not experience the camps cannot directly depict the horror of that experience, that they are incapacitated. Adorno fashions this incapacitation into a critical tool. Even though Beckett did not personally experience Auschwitz, Adorno holds that Beckett's literature more faithfully reproduces such an incapacitated experience through its absence of that experience, its negativity. In *Metaphysics* [1965], Adorno even makes the case that *The*

[154] See Adorno's consideration in *Aesthetic Theory* that: "fictive narration can touch more deeply on the essence of historical reality than can factual reportage [.]" (121).

*Unnamable* and *Endgame* would not be "better or truer" if Beckett had been imprisoned in a concentration camp himself (124).

Yet Adorno also seems to have drawn upon Beckett's language in *The Unnamable* to find the words to describe the inability to talk about these unspeakable topics in the face of false consciousness. For example, if we turn to Adorno's essay "Titles – Paraphrases on Lessing" [1961], he uses Beckett's titles to illustrate this dynamic: "One of Beckett's titles, *L'innommable, The Unnameable,* not only fits its subject matter but also embodies the truth about the namelessness of contemporary literature. Not a word in it has any value now if it does not say the unsayable, the fact that it cannot be said." (*NTL2* 4).[155] Adorno is taken by the French title *L'Innommable* as an apt descriptor for the situation he finds himself in: unable to properly come to terms with and discuss Auschwitz. Adorno's emphasis on the novel's title paints it as a cipher that embodies both the content of the novel and a wider truth – not just about literature, but the contemporary "situation" of a post-Auschwitz society that cannot speak about this condition. The fact that this unspeakable situation is embodied by a Beckettian text suggests that the novel has a privileged expressive function of communicating this unspeakable quality. Indeed, if we closely compare the kind of descriptive language that Adorno is using in this analysis of *The Unnamable's* title with the language of Beckett's text, we see that Adorno's dialectical act of voicing the inability to speak is drawn directly from Beckett's novel itself; the narrator's point that "speaking of things of which I cannot speak" closely resembles Adorno's construction of "say[ing] the unsayable" ["*das Unsägliche sagte*"] (Beckett, *The Unnamable* 293-94; Adorno, *Noten* 326). Adorno's identification of the discursive element of Beckett's novel challenges the interpretation that he thought that Beckett's literature should be *totally* stripped of any context. Instead, Adorno betrays his desire to make the suppressed, unsayable traumas of the war manifest through the body of the novel.

To respond to the fall-out of the war, Adorno occasionally flirted with the idea of returning to Freudian psychoanalysis. In his unpublished "Remarks on The Authoritarian Personality" [1949],

[155] Please note that I have retained the formatting and spelling of the titles as they are written in the English translation of Adorno's essay "Titles". The German original of this essay in Adorno's *Noten zur Literatur* only mentions the French title alone: "Einer von Beckett, '*L'innommable*' [.]" (326).

Adorno states that his methodology for the published *The Authoritarian Personality* [1950] was "in full harmony with psychoanalysis in its more orthodox, Freudian version." (7). Commentators such as Eric Oberle in *Theodor Adorno and the Century of Negative Identity* [2018] have argued that this unpublished post-script's appeal to a 'pure' Freudian psychoanalysis would have been received as a surprising standpoint (especially for a theorist working in a Marxist tradition that had tended to look at psychoanalysis with some suspicion) (241-42.). However, Adorno's comments on "orthodox" psychoanalysis elsewhere illuminate why he might have been making this move. In "The Meaning of Working Through the Past" [1959], Adorno comments:

> A precise and undiluted knowledge of Freudian theory is more necessary and relevant today than ever. The hatred of it is directly of a piece with anti-Semitism, by no means simply because Freud was a Jew but rather because psychoanalysis consists precisely of that critical self-reflection that makes anti-Semites livid with rage. […] if rigorous psychoanalysis found its institutional place, its influence upon the intellectual climate in Germany would be a salutary one, even if that meant nothing more than taking it for granted that one should not lash outward but should reflect about oneself and one's relation to whatever obdurate consciousness habitually rages against. (*Critical Models* 16).

Adorno's view that Freudian psychoanalysis is a method of "critical self-reflection" is even more enlightening than his comments in his "Remarks". Despite insisting once more on an "orthodox" therapeutic approach in his repeated commitment to an "undiluted knowledge of Freudian theory", in practice he focuses less on the specifics of the psychoanalytic method and more on its drive to critique the individual's incapacitated mental state after the war. In this respect, Adorno suggests that psychoanalysis provides a general blueprint and psychological structure (in the sense that it is critical and that it probes one's state of incapacity) for a therapeutic redressal of Germany's past after the war.[156]

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[156] As Idit Dobbs-Weinstein has shown in *Spinoza's Critique of Religion and Its Heirs* [2015], Adorno favours an approach of a psychoanalytic "working upon" ["*verarbeiten*"] of Germany's crimes against humanity over the country's post-war approach of "working through the past" ["*Aufarbeitung*"] (236). Dobbs-Weinstein emphasises, however, that both approaches are rooted Freud's notion of "*durcharbeitung*", or psychologically working out or through a trauma. (236).

Adorno's therapeutic reading of *The Unnamable* offers an example of where Adorno's post-war theory attempts to appropriate psychoanalytic interpretation to grapple with false consciousness. In his annotations to a passage on the narrator's so-called "vice existers" (or alter egos) in *Der Namenlose*, Adorno reads Beckett's text as an allegorisation of Sigmund Freud's second topography. Adorno interprets Mahood as a parodic representation of the ego and Worm as the representation of the id: "[Marginalie:] Worm = id Mahood = ego Idealism'[us] Parodie" (*Frankfurter* 45).[157] Adorno bases his interpretation of Worm and Mahood on Freudian texts such as the lecture "Ego and Id" [1923], where Freud declares that: "The ego represents what may be called reason and common sense, in contrast to the id, which contains the passions." (*The Standard Edition Vol. 22* 25). Freud defined the id as an instinctual agent that only follows its own desires (the pleasure-principle) rather than the external world. Meanwhile, he defined the ego as a reasoning agent that interacts with the external world and uses this reality principle to attempt to allay the id's instinctual drive towards its desires. Adorno reads Mahood as Freud's sensible ego because Beckett describes his character as a voice of reason: "Of me whom they have reduced to reason." (*The Unnamable* 340). In contrast, Adorno interprets Worm as the Freudian id precisely because the character is described as unthinking and voiceless: "No, I have no voice, in this matter I have none. That's one of the reasons why I confused myself with Worm. But I have no reason either, no reason, I'm like Worm [.]" (350). By staging the narrator's "vice existers" as psychological agents with conflicting aims – either towards a chaotic pursuit of pleasure or a restrictive deference to reality - Adorno reads Beckett's text through Freudian psychoanalysis to suggest how *The Unnamable* might give voice to the mind's internal conflicts.

Adorno's psychoanalytic reading does correlate with some aspects of Beckett's engagement with Freud's ideas of the ego and id. Beckett's notes on psychology feature one single passage about Freud's second topography (Feldman, *Beckett's* 30-31).[158] This passage was a revision of the 1923

[157] This annotation appears next to the following passage in *Der Namenlose*: "*Es stimmt, der arme Worm kann nichts dafür. Was weiß ich davon? Aber beenden wir unseren Gedanken, bevor wir darauf scheißen. Denn wenn ich Mahood bin, so bin ich auch Worm. Pluff*." (Beckett 107). The equivalent passage in the English version is as follows: "It is true poor Worm is not to blame for this. That's soon said. But let me complete my views, before I shit on them. For if I am Mahood, I am Worm too, plop. Or if I am not yet Worm, I shall be when I cease to be Mahood, plop." (*The Unnamable* 340).

[158] Feldman emphasises that "these are the only notes Beckett took from Freud's writings. Also, in keeping with Beckett's later allusions, the reference is small and not for intended 'solution' [.]" (*Beckett's* 31).

characterization of the ego and id, which Beckett copied from Freud's "Anatomy of the Mental Personality" in *New Introductory Lectures* [1933] (Beckett qtd. in Feldman, *Beckett's* 30-31).[159] There is at least one explicit reference to the phrase "ego" in the passage: "Do they believe I believe it is I who am speaking? That's theirs too. To make me believe I have an ego all my own [.]" (Beckett, *The Unnamable* 348). In the original French text, Beckett writes "I have an ego all my own" as "*Pour me fair croire que j'ai un moi à moi* [.]" ("*un moi*" is often used in French psychoanalytic theory to mean "the ego" or "the self") (*L'Innommable* 98). Beckett may have alluded to the id as well, except in a subtler fashion. Take the sentence: "And now for the it, I prefer that [.]" (*The Unnamable* 384). As an English speaker might notice on closer inspection, the phrase "the it" is not a conventional phrase. Considering Beckett's German language skills, he may have been aware that "the it" is a literal translation of the German word for "the id" ["*das Es*"]. The potential psychoanalytic denotation of this phrase is strengthened if we examine the same phrase in the original 1953 French text; in Beckett's *L'Innommable,* this sentence begins with "*Et maintenant le ça* […]", with "*le ça*" being a word that is used in French psychoanalysis to refer to the id (157). But as there are only two or so textual examples of (potential) references to the ego and id (which are not invoked in the exact same manner as Adorno's interpretation of Mahood and Worm), there is a gap between Adorno's psychoanalytic interpretations of Beckett's work and Beckett's own approach to the matter.

But Adorno's most telling psychoanalytic reading of Beckett is perhaps his discussion of dreams in his interpretation of *The Unnamable.* Although Adorno did not fully advocate the specifics of Freud's dream-work theory, he was clearly inspired by Freud's argument in *The Interpretation of Dreams* [1900] that even the most abstract dream can be interpreted as shining a light on some real, latent event from the analysand's past or can communicate something that is otherwise unspoken in waking life (especially one's repressed desires) (*The Standard Edition Vol. 4* 106-21).[160] Specifically, Adorno treated Freudian dream-work as he treated "orthodox psychoanalysis" above – less like

[159] An English version of Freud's lecture can also be found in Freud's *Standard Edition Vol. 22,* but the title is translated as: "The Dissection of the Psychical Personality" (57-80).
[160] See Freud's analysis of his own dream about his patient Irma in *The Interpretation of Dreams,* especially his discussions of the dream's status as the wish fulfilment of his desire to get back at those who (he presumes) slighted his abilities as a practitioner (*The Standard Edition Vol. 4* 106-21).

dogma and more as a methodology that might provoke critical self-reflection into the difficult aspects of waking life. Adorno chose instead to interpret Beckett's work as a vehicle that might uncover what is repressed in society. As he comments in his annotations to *Der Namenlose*: "But also the contrary, a metaphysics, experience of a condition beyond death and life […] Indicated in dreams. […] Simplest answer to why [*L'Innommable* is] so enormously significant: because it comes closest to the conception of what it will really be like after death (the *innommable* dreams it). […] This is precisely the Beckettian no man's land." (176). By locating the significance of the novel in the *innommable*'s dream narratives, Adorno appears to be touching upon passages such as the one found in the closing page where the narrator - the *innommable* - surmises: "[…] perhaps it's a dream, all a dream, that would surprise me, I'll wake, in the silence, and never sleep again, it will be I, or dream, dream again, dream of a silence, a dream silence [.]" (Beckett, *The Unnamable* 418). Here, the narrator's consideration that it might wake from a dream and fall into a constant state of insomnia (or that the dream itself may be a "silent" state of insomnia itself) evokes what Adorno considered a "no man's land": an impossible hallucinatory purgatory between life and death. For Adorno, this liminal state – which borrowed from the imagery of the trenches of the First World War - acts as an allegory for what he conceives as impossible in waking life: the ability to talk about or even live after the war.

This Beckettian state of "no-man's land" often materialised as the corporeal torture and beheadings that haunted Adorno's nightmares. In his annotations to *Der Namenlose*, Adorno focuses on how Beckett's motifs of "corpses" and "mutilations" can be taken as "the essence of living" ("Notes on Beckett" 175-76). This dialectical image of the living yet mutilated corpse is also invoked in Adorno's posthumously published *Dream Notes*. Many of these dreams feature situations in which Adorno imagines himself in the death camps, either as a victim or a persecutor. Some of the most vivid images in these persecution dreams are the various depictions of violence against the body: executions such as crucifixions, firing squads and beheadings. For example, in "Frankfurt, end of December 1959", Adorno experiences an:

> Execution dream. Beheading. Not clear if my head was to be chopped off or guillotined. But so as to keep it still, I placed it in a groove. The blade scraped away at my neck, unpleasantly

> trying it out. I asked the executioner to spare me this and get on with it. The blow fell but I did not wake up. […] I waited on tenterhooks to see whether I would go on living or whether after a few seconds all thought would be extinguished. Soon, however, there could be no doubt of my continued existence. I observed that my body was gone, but that I was still there, quite apart from my head. I also seemed capable of perception. But I then discovered to my horror that every avenue through which I might show myself or communicate had been completely cut off. (*Dream* 63-64).

Whilst this dream predates Adorno's likely engagement with *The Unnamable* (although it does not predate his entire engagement with Beckett – he had written his essay on *Endgame* by this point), Adorno's frequent experience of anxiety dreams about a living yet voiceless severed head might indicate why this novel resonated so much with him. For example, see the *innommable*'s dream-like description of its own head in a jar: "For of the great traveller I had been, on my hands and knees in the later stages, then crawling on my belly or rolling on the ground, only the trunk remains (in sorry trim), surmounted by the head with which we are already familiar." (Beckett, *The Unnamable* 329). Just a few pages later, the narrator describes how its head has now become separate from the trunk: "For a collar*,* fixed to the mouth of the jar*,* now encircled my neck*,* just below the chin." (334). Here, *The Unnamable* provides an image of a decapitated head that is nevertheless thinking and narrating, capturing the impossible situation of a stasis between living and dying that Adorno so often dreamt of.

For Adorno, the otherwise fictive state of this beheaded no-man's land was actually rooted in a very real backdrop of beheadings that occurred during and after the Second World War in Europe. In *Philosophy of Samuel Beckett* [2001], John Calder has claimed that the severed head in *The Unnamable* was inspired by reports of a beheading in post-war France (119-20). Whilst there is a chance that Calder is actually repeating a reworking of the debunked tale that Antoine Lavoisier's severed head blinked fifteen times when he was killed in the French Revolution, Calder maintains that Beckett would probably have known about a famous report circulating in the 1950s: that two criminals were guillotined and interrogated afterwards, their eyes blinking in response to the questions (36). Adorno's dreams betray that he was equally likely to have picked up on this element in Beckett,

having himself been aware of the role of the guillotine during this period. In addition to the dream above, on "14 July 1945" Adorno also dreamt of an:

> Execution scene. Whether the victims were fascist or anti-fascists remained unclear. […] Everyone went up into the automated guillotine in no discernible order, and came out again without a head, staggered on for a few steps and then fell down dead. […] I observed the movements of the headless men and thought that I should try to find out whether they were still conscious and whether, as seemed to me to be the case, they took care to avoid falling down on top of one another. (*Dream* 36).

Both the French rumour and Adorno's dream scene were probably inspired by very real beheadings that happened in Europe around this time. For example, in Nazi Germany, Johann Reichhart notoriously used the apparatus to behead political dissidents.[161] After the war, the guillotine continued to be used to execute Nazi collaborators in East Germany and murderers in France.[162]

This material basis to these imagined beheadings would chime with Russell Perkins' reading of the function of dreams in Adornian theory: that Adorno uses dreams to understand the experience of the Holocaust as an individual who had no direct experience of the death camps (23-24). Perkins' argument rests on the dialectical idea that one can read biographical information in Adorno's nightmares precisely because they are violently self-effacing dreams (24). However, one of the most telling accounts of Adorno's dreams is an example in *Negative Dialectics* that Perkins' article does not explicitly mention:

> But it is not wrong to raise the less cultural question whether after Auschwitz you can go on living - especially whether one who escaped by accident, one who by rights should have been

[161] See Gisela Schertling and Katharina Schüddekopf's *Gestapo Interrogation Transcripts* [2008] (213).
[162] For example, see Christian Dirks' work on the execution of SS Doctor Horst Fischer (the last person to be executed by guillotine ever in East Germany) in "'Vergangenheitsbewältigung'" [2011] (368). See also Simon Grivet's comment in "Executions and the Debate over Abolition in France and the United States" [2011]: "In the last years of the 1940s, French jurors displayed a draconian severity, with hundreds of murderers being sent to the guillotine." (153). Adorno's violent dreams also demonstrate his awareness of other forms of execution that Beckett likely heard about in post-war France; in a dream that took place on 4 February 1946, Adorno takes on the identity of Vichy politician Pierre Laval (*Dream* 44-45). Laval was executed for his Nazi sympathies via firing squad on 15 October 1945 (see, for example, René de Chambrun's *Pierre Laval: Traitor Or Patriot?* [1984] [vii]).

> killed, may go on living […] this is the drastic guilt of him who was spared. By way of atonement he will be plagued by dreams such as that he is no longer living at all, that he was sent to the ovens in 1944 and his whole existence since has been imaginary, an emanation of the insane wish of a man killed twenty years earlier. (362-63)

In this imagined scene, Adorno betrays that this description of "one who escaped by accident" is most probably an autobiographical glimpse into his own dreams and psyche. The discussion of the unconscious survivor's "guilt" that emerges out of this scene is one of those instances where Adorno slips into more personal reflections about how one could deal with the traumatic aftermath of the war. In step with Perkins' analysis, Adorno intimates that dreams provide a site in which one can confront an event that they did not even experience themselves. This attitude certainly enlightens Adorno's description of *The Unnamable* as a novel that is constituted of "episodic pseudo-narrative" ("Notes on Beckett" 41). This phrase could be read as a comment on the numerous moments where the narrative does not appear to offer any meaning (i.e. that it is not saying anything). Yet his emphasis that Beckett offers a false narrative also indicates that Adorno's therapeutic reading embraces *The Unnamable* as a book that acknowledges its narratives as works of fiction, with flashes of numerous hallucinatory scenes that are not true but essentially dream scenes. And yet, just like the Freudian dream-work, Adorno seizes upon the idea that despite their fictional status, these Beckettian dream scenes are rooted in and rework very real remnants from the war.

*The Unnamable's* dream-like "pseudo-narratives" could be read as a means of working upon the real physical and mental afflictions from the Second World War.[163] For example, consider the moment when the narrator assumes the identity of Mahood (who has lost an arm and a leg) when he is "coming to the end of a world tour" (Beckett, *The Unnamable* 319). Mahood goes on to recollect his return to a family, including a wife who has had children "born in my absence" (319-20). There are fragments interjected into this scene which read as the family's judgmental gaze on Mahood's behaviour:

[163] Although there is always the possibility that the dreams might incorporate traumatic events that are not reducible to the war.

> What about throwing him a few scraps? No no, it might upset him. […] A few more summers and he'll be in our midst. Where am I going to put him? In the basement? […] What possesses him to be stopping all the time? Oh look children, quick he's down on his hands and knee, admittedly that must have been worth seeing. […] Poor Papa, he burned to encourage me vocally. […] But in view of the trouble I was having, the trouble I was taking, they held him back, pointing out that the moment was ill-chosen to give me a shock. (320-22).

Here, we have a scene of a family that is detached physically from Mahood. The disembodied voices appear to talk about Mahood as if he were merely something to stare at rather than someone to engage with directly. The language that they use to describe their fear of triggering a response in Mahood ("it might upset him" or "ill-chosen to give me a shock") implies that not only is Mahood physically injured by war (as indicated by his crawling on his "hands and knee"), but that he also has a mental condition resembling PTSD ("give me a shock"). The narrator's insistence that this is not a 'real' scene – Mahood claims his family had died of "sausage poisoning" before this homecoming scene could even take place - lends the scene a fictional, dream-like quality (321). However, the story's imagery of amputation and shellshock appears to replicate the scene of an amputee returning from a war to the family that had gone on in his absence, a family who struggle to connect to him upon his return. In this sense, this story is quite possibly loosely based on a 'real' event from waking life that has now become confused and distorted (hence why the narrator self-consciously assumes that the recollection is mere fiction). Now that we have considered Adorno's interest in Beckett's therapeutic potential, we will see how this interpretation was short-lived and ultimately rejected by Adorno himself.

**2. The Failed Therapy**

In February 1961, Adorno presented a famous public reading of extracts from his essay "Trying to Understand Endgame" at Suhrkamp Publisher's celebration of Samuel Beckett. Suhrkamp's director Siegfried Unseld's anecdote about the occasion would be repeated by scholars to demonstrate the interpretive disagreement between the author's intentions and the theorist's reading of the play. During a lunch beforehand, Adorno was alleged to have told Beckett about his theory that

Hamm clearly emanated from Shakespeare's character Hamlet. Unseld claims that the playwright was unconvinced by the reading:

> Beckett said: 'Sorry, Professor, but I never thought of Hamlet when I invented this name.' But Adorno insisted. And Beckett became a little angry […] In the evening Adorno started his speech and, of course, pointed out the derivation of 'Hamm' from 'Hamlet' […] Beckett listened very patiently. But then he whispered into my ear – he said this in German but I will translate it into English – 'This is the progress of science that professors can proceed with their errors!' (Unseld qtd. in Knowlson 479).

Although this account is Unseld's claim about Beckett's apparent feelings about Hamm's Shakespearean origin rather than a direct account from the writer himself, this alleged reaction is not out of step with Beckett's other comments on the approaches to *Endgame* by various professional literary critics, from academics to journalists. As he declared elsewhere: "If people want to have headaches among the overtones, let them. And provide their own aspirin. Hamm as stated, Clov as stated, together as stated [.]" (Beckett, *Disjecta* 109). This remark reinforces the idea that Beckett often displayed indifference and even hostility to the critical excavation of some hidden 'meaning' in his work that he had not otherwise offered to his audience. The image of the headache that the critics must supply themselves suggests that the literary critical exercise is essentially an illness, a mental strain in itself, that tries to burrow into something that has been laid out bare ("as stated"). Therefore, if Unseld's report on Beckett's words has any purchase, it suggests that Beckett considered Adorno's approach to be essentially erroneous, a failed attempt to use his play for purposes that it did not serve.

To better understand Beckett's contention, we can explore what Adorno's reading of Hamlet might have been grasping at: a psychoanalytic analysis of Hamm as a character. Amongst the several references to *Hamlet* in "Trying to Understand Endgame", Adorno explicitly interprets the origin of Hamm as follows: "Grimly, the name of Beckett's hero abbreviates Shakespeare's; the name of the now liquidated dramatic subject, that of the first dramatic subject." (*NTL1* 267). Adorno interprets the stump-like quality of Hamm's name as evidence that Hamm is a distorted, inverted version of Shakespeare's figure. Hamlet is well-known for his self-consciousness - as exemplified by his famous

soliloquy in Act 3 Scene 1 or his hesitance to kill Claudius whilst he is praying in Act 3 Scene 3 (Shakespeare 239, 274). Just as Adorno and Horkheimer read Odysseus anachronistically as an allegory for the dialectic of enlightenment, Adorno reads Hamm as a representative of the degenerated, dissolved individual of the twentieth century who no longer has access to a self-consciousness because this very self-consciousness had led to its own dissolution (see "Chapter 4" for a discussion on this liquidated individualism) (*NTL1* 271-73). And yet Adorno's characterisation of Hamm elsewhere suggests that he is also committing a more psychoanalytic reading of the character. For example, in a section on Hamm's elderly parents, Adorno discusses how:

> Hamm lets the torsos of his parents, who have turned into babies in the garbage cans, starve to death, the triumph of the son as father. Chatter accompanies this:
>
> > NAGG: Me pap!
> >
> > HAMM: Accursed progenitor!" (Beckett, *Endgame* 9 qtd. in Adorno, *NTL1* 258).

Adorno's notion of "the triumph of the son as father" indicates that he reads Hamm and his parents' absurd and fraught relationship through the prism of the psychoanalytic Oedipus complex. Adorno clearly reads the various father-and-son moments displayed in the play in this Freudian vein, in which the son seeks to murder his father and take his place (*NTL1* 244, 256-59, 266-67).

Adorno's Freudian reading of *Endgame's* 'hero' as Hamlet adds another layer to Beckett's objection to the idea that his character derived from a specific source. Adorno's frequent references to *The Interpretation of Dreams* indicates that he was likely to have been aware of Freud's reading of Hamlet as a literary character who suffered from the Oedipus complex. According to Freud, *Hamlet's* titular character can also be interpreted as a "hysteric" (*The Interpretation* 264-65). Freud elaborates that the basic fantasy acted upon in *Oedipus Rex* is repressed in Shakespeare's play and leads to the neurosis of Hamlet (264). Infamously, in a theory that he would eventually renounce due to its historical inaccuracies, Freud decides to apply this reading to Hamlet's creator, even arguing that Shakespeare composed *Hamlet* whilst he was mourning his father and his son Hamnet (266). In his infamous reading of *Endgame* that allegedly irked Beckett, Adorno's psychoanalytic reading of Hamm borrows from Freudian dream theory. Adorno described this psychoanalytic interpretive

approach in *Prisms* [1967]: “According to Freud, psychoanalysis devotes its attention to the ‘dregs of the world of appearances’. He is thinking of psychic phenomena, parapraxes, dreams and neurotic symptoms.” (250-51). Adorno assumes that there is some unconscious conflict that can be read within the character or even the author, or that Hamm is Hamlet and, therefore, Oedipus. Revealingly, Adorno’s connection between Hamm and Shakespeare’s Hamlet borrows an approach from Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams*: reading meaning in linguistic similarities and puns even if the instances seem coincidental to a sceptic like Beckett.

However, Adorno is aware that Beckett’s work itself actively problematises his psychoanalytic reading of Hamm. As Adorno says of Beckett: “Beckett shrugs his shoulders at the possibility of philosophy today, at the very possibility of theory.” (*NTL1* 244). Adorno is conscious that the play itself resists his psychoanalytic reading (and, indeed, his practice of critical theory). Take Hamm’s questioning of Clov’s parentage:

> HAMM: Do you remember your father.
>
> CLOV: [*Wearily*.] Same answer. [*Pause*.] You've asked me these questions millions of times.
>
> HAMM: I love the old questions. [*With fervour*.] Ah the old questions, the old answers, there's nothing like them! [*Pause*.] It was I was a father to you. (Beckett, *Endgame* 25).

Adorno argues that this passage presents Hamm’s question as futile, “bourgeois sentiment” (*NTL1* 244). But the question “do you remember your father” – which parodies the psychoanalytic obsession of rooting trauma in one’s upbringing - is quickly rebuffed by Clov (although not before Hamm reasserts his own position as a surrogate father figure). Despite the fact that the son’s desire to kill the father is definitely made explicit in the play (see Clov’s mutterings on his desire to kill his father figure, “If I could kill him I'd die happy.” [Beckett, *Endgame* 19]), the humour of these passages suggests that Beckett is offering a parodic account of his critics’ reductive, psychologising interpretations of his work.

This contradiction is nevertheless consistent with Adorno’s theory, which shows that he also maintained a healthy scepticism of psychoanalytic readings of art and literature. For example, in *Aesthetic Theory,* Adorno critiques what he suggests is Freud’s idea that “art should deal affirmatively

with the negativity of experience." (8-9). Adorno dismisses this interpretation of literature as a curative aid because its positive emphasis refuses to confront the negativity of the society that the artwork has emanated from. After the war, Adorno was highly sceptical of readings that claimed that one could merely think positively out of a bad situation. Yet one of Adorno's biggest problems with Freud's apparent affirmative art is the psychoanalyst's consequent tendency to completely dismiss the negative aspects of literature just as one might do with a patient's dream: specifically, reducing the work's negativity to mere marks of "the process of repression" and, therefore, of the protagonist's or even the author's own neurosis (8-9).[164] Adorno's rejection of this desire to transform society's negativity into an overwhelmingly positive artistic form is explained by his characterisation of Beckett as an ostensibly negative writer: "*Endgame* moves away from the nadir only by calling its own name […]: the negation of negativity." (*NTL1* 254). As evident in his critique of psychoanalytic theories of art in *Aesthetic Theory,* Adorno does not think that the limited diagnostic approach of reducing a work's negative form to "repression" goes far enough, especially as it would miss the critical edge of Beckettian negativity (but more on this later). Adorno contended that a negative literary form was more readily the scarred product of a negative reality: "[Beckett's] shabby, damaged world of images is the negative imprint of the administered world." (*AT* 31). In addition to the fact that Adorno's idea of the negation of the negation could be construed as a move towards a kind of positivity, his psychoanalytic reading of Beckett is contradicted by his view that negativity is objective (i.e. that it has a real social basis) and cannot be wished away by a redemptive form of therapy or consoling notions of art.[165]

It would be difficult for Adorno to miss the hostility to the psychoanalyst's gaze in Beckett's texts. If we briefly return to Beckett's *The Unnamable,* we see that its narrator explicitly resists the therapeutic relationship. The unnamable criticises the methods of "Basil and his crew", who can be taken to be psychoanalysts who are treating the narrator as their analysand (Beckett, *The Unnamable*

[164] As indicated by Adorno's criticism that "artists whose work gave uncensored shape to the negativity of life are dismissed as neurotics" (*AT* 8).
[165] Adorno's resistance to psychoanalytic approaches to art is especially clear if we turn to his following statement: "If art is sanctioned exclusively as sublimation, as a means for the maintenance of psychic economy, its truth content is contravened and art lingers on only as a pious deception." (*AT* 340-41).

303).[166] The narrator's particular hostility towards Basil – who is later renamed Mahood - is based upon a rejection of the doctor's powerful gaze: "[Basil] filled me with hatred. Without opening his mouth, fastening on me his eyes like cinders with all their seeing, he changed me a little more each time into what he wanted me to be. Is he still glaring at me, from the shadows?" (300). Basil's gaze is characterised as a violation: the description of the enduring cinder-like eyes "with all their seeing" gives Basil's stare an omniscience that penetrates the narrator's body, thereby making the narrator paranoid that it is being witnessed by an agent that they cannot see in "the shadows". The notion that Basil's gaze "changed" the patient into "what he wanted me to be" intimates that the analyst imposes a false diagnosis and ideal onto the patient's body in total disregard to the narrator's experience of its body, or what the unnamable reluctantly terms "my true situation" (311). For example, when the unnamable talks about its "body incapable of the smallest movement and whose very eyes can no longer close as they once could, according to Basil and his crew", the narrator emphasises that its knowledge of its ailment did not originate from its own perception (i.e. from its own gaze from its eyes that cannot shut) but that it was dictated from above by Basil (303). This passage essentially enacts the unequal interpretive power in the therapeutic relationship. On one hand, the doctor's narrative is forced upon the patient – for example, the narrator complains that Basil/Mahood has "heaped stories on my head" (311). Meanwhile, the narrator is unable to counter this dynamic and establish its own distinct voice as a patient: "But [Mahood's] voice continued to testify for me, as though woven into mine, preventing me from saying who I was [.]" (311).

Adorno was alert to the asymmetries of power within physical and mental therapy and therefore acknowledged the limits of psychoanalysing *The Unnamable.* In his notes to *Der Namenlose*, Adorno writes of a: "Possibility arising from the doctor's gaze. The gaze on the living from the dissection room." ("Notes on Beckett" 177). Significantly, Adorno takes the Beckettian motif of the "doctor's gaze" and situates it in *dem Sezierraum*, or "the dissection room[s]" where Nazis conducted experiments on human bodies – for example, at the Mauthausen Concentration

[166] Beckett hints that these figures are psychoanalysts when the narrator makes the sardonic comment that the relationship with one's mother is "one of [Basil and his crew's] favourite subjects, of conversation" (*The Unnamable* 303).

Camp.[167] Immediately following his discussion of *Endgame* in *Negative Dialectics,* Adorno reads the reduced bodies in the death camps through the lens of the therapeutic relation: "That in the concentration camps it was no longer an individual who died, but as a specimen—this is a fact bound to affect the dying of those who escaped the administrative measure." (362). Adorno's use of the word "specimen" ["*Exemplar*"] is parodying the cold, detached Nazi reduction of the human into an animal that is being dissected for scientific experimentation, the kind of dehumanising science practised by Dr Josef Mengele (*Negative Dialektik* 353). When Adorno argues that Clov's decision to attack a flea he thinks is on his body with "insecticide" anticipates the horror of the concentration camps, he is suggesting that Beckett's gaze plays upon the physiognomic literature that diagnosed the Jewish body as "*Ungeziefer* […] insects like lice [.]" (Adorno, *NTL1* 210; Beckett, *Endgame* 22; Gilman 80). In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno uses the word "*Exemplar"* ["specimen"] to talk about the instrumental subsumption of the particular (i.e. the individual mentioned above) into a general concept (a mere *exemplar* of a category). This process was previously illustrated in *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* where he compares the "exemplar" under the Holocaust to the "rabbit suffering the torment of the laboratory […] as a representative but, mistakenly, as a mere exemplar." (Adorno and Horkheimer 7). Whilst Adorno is often described as a philosopher who desired to join the Marxist and psychoanalytic traditions together, he is concerned by the idea that psychoanalysis might end up serving, rather than critiquing, capitalism's instrumental ends. Adorno argues that through its stock diagnoses, the "medical gaze" essentially subjects the "individual" to the process of objectification, a historical situation of desubjectification that, in his essay on *Endgame,* Adorno claims was a major element of the Holocaust (*NTL1* 249).

We can see how this uneasy relationship with psychoanalysis plagues Adorno's idea that the body of the text could uncover and begin to discuss the bodies of the Holocaust's victims. In "Trying to Understand Endgame", Adorno focuses on the play's ample images of body parts that are missing, mutilated or no longer working as they once did (*NTL1* 252, 254-55, 257, 265-69). In one of the most

[167] See Evelyn Le Chene's account of the dissection table in her book *Mauthausen: The History of a Death Camp* [1971] (88)

notable instances, Adorno draws upon the following exchange on Nagg's body as an illustrative example for developing three of his own theoretical arguments:

> HAMM: Give him a biscuit. [*Exit* CLOV.] Accursed fornicator! How are your stumps?
>
> NAGG: Never mind me stumps. (Beckett, *Endgame* 10).

Adorno uses the image of Nagg's and Nell's "torsos" or "stumps" to discuss Beckett's language, Hamm's Oedipal desires to commit parricide and, most importantly, the idea that the stump was the perfect absurd motif for the lacerated experience of the Second World War (*NTL1* 265-66 and *NTL2* 234).[168] Adorno's third argument that draws upon the motif of Beckett's "stumps" tells us a lot about the mechanics of Adorno's literary criticism. In *Dialectics of the Body* [2005], Lisa Yun Lee argues that Adorno's appeal to the body is bound up with his project of treating modernist literature as a privileged critical domain. To support this, she quotes a passage from *Minima Moralia* where Adorno makes a recourse to the "metaphor of the body" ["*Gleichnis des Leibes*"] (*MM* 242 and *Minima Moralia: Reflexionen* 276). Adorno's term "metaphor" or "*Gleichnis*" (which also translates into "parable", "simile" or "allegory") emphasises that he developed an idea of a textual body that could also represent very real, human bodies. Indeed, in Yun Lee's analysis of Adorno's essay "Notes on Kafka", she writes:

> At other times, the body functions in Adorno's writing as the privileged metaphor for form and style. […] The body that Adorno invokes at these moments is the spontaneous body that reveals in its gestures the fleeting moments of freedom and potential for resistance. […] It is precisely the form of the essay that allows the critic to explore the margins and boundaries of a text— those moments that are most often left unexamined, forgotten and repressed. (11, 76).

Just as Yun Lee is playing on two denotations of the word 'body', she suggests that Adorno also aligns these two types of bodies: the "'damaged (*beschädigt*)' German Jewish body" with the "body of [literature]" (11, 17). By characterising the textual body as the fractured, open-ended body where

[168] "From this point of view Beckett's human stumps are more realistic than portraits of reality that already soften it through their pictorial quality." (Adorno, *NTL2* 234).

"repressed" thoughts can be written out, Yun Lee suggests that Adorno reflects the social reality of the death camps through the fragmented, experimental form of modernist writing.

Although Yun Lee misses out Adorno's interest in the bodies in Beckett's works, her discussion of Adorno's concept of the "metaphor of the body" is directly applicable to Adorno's double-edged reading of the bodies in *Endgame*.[169] In *Negative Dialectics,* Adorno makes the following observation about Beckett's play: "What is, he says, is *like a concentration camp."* (380). Here, Adorno provides a simile that implies that Beckett's words – or perhaps even Beckett's thoughts on being ("what is") - directly represent the death camps of the Holocaust in the fictional, divergent manner of Dickensian allegory (see "Chapter 1"). Just as Adorno considers Beckett to be an artist who writes about the "physiognomy of what is no longer human", Adorno argues that the figurative quality of Beckett's textual bodies is what embodies the very real sites of violence in the Holocaust (*NTL1* 254). In another example, this time in "Trying to Understand Endgame", Adorno more explicitly plays with the idea that the body of Beckett's texts reflects the bodies in the concentration camps: "The dramatic constituents put in a posthumous appearance. Exposition, complication, plot, peripetia and catastrophe return in decomposed form as participants in an examination of the dramaturgical corpse." (260). Adorno reads the dramatic form and theatrical elements of Beckettian drama as corpses themselves that represent the corpses of the dissection rooms and camps that he otherwise discusses in his analysis of *Endgame.*

Adorno's third and perhaps most significant reading of Beckett's texts as mutilated bodies that reflect the mutilation of bodies in society is found in the part of his essay that explicitly critiques the culture industry. Take Adorno's interest in a particular word in the following passage of Beckett's play:

> CLOV: [*after reflection*.] Nor I. [*He gets up on ladder, turns the telescope on the without.*] Let's see. [*He looks, moving the telescope*.] Zero ... [*he looks*] … zero ... [*he looks*] ... and zero.

[169] The only exception to Yun Lee's omission of Beckett is her brief discussion of how Adorno repeatedly invokes Hamm and Clov to reflect death, or the "negative space of being" (120).

> HAMM: Nothing stirs. All is-
>
> CLOV: Zer-
>
> HAMM: [*Violently.*] Wait till you're spoken to. [*Normal voice*.] All is ... all is ... all is what? [*Violently.*] All is what?
>
> CLOV: What all is? In a word. Is that what you want to know? Just a moment. [*He turns the telescope on the without, looks, lowers the telescope, turns toward Hamm*.] Corpsed. (*Endgame* 20).

Adorno did not take the word "Corpsed" as it is written in the English version of the play, but he interpreted it as it was written in the German translation: "*Kaputt*" ["broken"] (*Noten* 285). This discrepancy between how Adorno and Beckett would have understood this particular line of the play means that Adorno pursued a very committed reading of the *broken* textual and human bodies through his own theory of the culture industry that Beckett would not have necessarily drawn himself (see the previous chapter on Adorno's unfaithful reading of Joyce).[170] As Adorno puts it: "In *Endgame*, a historical moment unfolds, namely the experience captured in the title of one of the culture industry's cheap novels, *Kaputt*." (*NTL1* 244). Adorno takes the word from Beckett's play – or, at the very least, the German translation of the word – and reimagines it as a title of a metaphorical, textual body that captures the "historical moment" of the culture industry.[171] Adorno uses this metaphorical novel to perform a Marxist critique of the bodies in *Endgame*:

> After the Second World War, everything, including a resurrected culture, has been destroyed without realizing it; humankind continues to vegetate, creeping along after events that even the survivors cannot really survive, on a rubbish heap that has made even reflection on one's own damaged state useless. The word *kaputt*, the pragmatic presupposition of the play, is snatched back from the marketplace. (244).

[170] Although a Yiddish word "*kaput*", from which the German derives, does have this connotation of death.
[171] Whilst the translator has translated "*Schundbuchs*" as "cheap novels", it can also be translated as "scrapbooks" or "rubbish books" (Adorno, *Versuch* 171).

By describing the play's presupposition as "*kaputt*", Adorno interprets Beckett's characters as victims of capitalism's instrumentalisation of the human body that reduces people into mere objects. In his view that "humankind continues to vegetate" ["*Die Menschheit vegetiert*"] after Auschwitz (an event that Adorno treats often interchangeably with capitalism itself), the term "vegetate" or "*vegetiert*" conveys the human body in the novel as one that is essentially unproductive (*Noten* 385). Accordingly, Adorno reads the mutilated "stumps" of Nagg and Nell as these obsolete bodies in capitalism because they are too old and infirm to serve its system (*NTL1* 266).[172]

However, Adorno is not fully convinced that the literary body could represent or even recuperate the real bodies damaged by the war, arguing that the body in society had already been destroyed beyond repair. Immediately following his discussion of the word "*kaputt*", Adorno observes that in *Endgame* the "fact that all human beings are dead is smuggled in on the sly." (*NTL1* 245) Even though he did not draw upon Beckett's English term "Corpsed!", Adorno reveals that he is fascinated by the ramification of the corpses that haunt Beckett's play. For instance, he dwells on a certain image evoked by a stage direction at the play's close: "[*Pause. He covers his face with handkerchief, lowers his arms to armrests, remains motionless*.]" (Beckett, *Endgame* 50). Adorno says of the image of the handkerchief on Hamm's face: "This run-of-the-mill image [of the cloth over the eyes], hardly unfamiliar even optically, becomes a sign only for the gaze that is aware of the face's loss of identity, of the possibility that its shrouded state is that of a dead man, of how repulsive the physical suffering is that already places the living man among the corpses by reducing him to his body." (*NTL1* 255). Despite his observation that Hamm and Clov are the sole survivors of a holocaust of all other human beings on the planet, his comment that "survivors cannot really survive" implies that they are not really exceptional after all, that they suffer the same fate as the corpses outside (244-45). He holds that the viewer's appeal to the disabled body essentially kills Hamm by reducing him to that very body – in other words, that the audience members who "gaze" upon his face witness and aid his dehumanisation. Of course, Adorno is offering a Marxist reading of Hamm here as a broken ["*kaputt*"] human, reduced to an object "snatched from the marketplace" that is then usurped by

[172] See the final section of this chapter for a more detailed discussion of this point.

another object (Adorno is emphatic that the handkerchief that annihilates Hamm and his identity is "his last possession": "The cloth makes him unrecognisable.") (254-55). Adorno concludes that the result of this process of objectification is Hamm's death. His insistence on reading the broken yet living bodies in the play as dead rather than merely injured seriously questions the idea that any method could recover the body from its annihilation. Ultimately, Adorno problematises his own appeal to Beckett's textual bodies, placing doubt on their ability to confront and represent the very real bodies in the Holocaust.

Adorno realises that his therapeutic reading of Beckett is unsustainable. At several points in his essay, Adorno is critical of Beckett's characters' preoccupation with medical relief: "The minor paraphernalia of health are of excessive importance to [Hamm]." (*NLT1* 269). Adorno appears to be alluding to Hamm's repeated question at various points of the play: "Is it not time for my pain-killer?" (Beckett, *Endgame* 8, 17, 23, 30, 42). Adorno offers here a seemingly harsh critique of a character who is understandably searching for some medication for his various physical ailments. But Adorno justifies this position by suggesting that there is something suspect about this appeal to a palliative. Indeed, Adorno interprets Hamm's question as "[reflecting a] slight aversion to medicine bottles, dating back to the moment when one became aware that one's parents were physically weak, mortal, falling apart [.]" (*NTL1* 256). In an Oedipal reading that traces Hamm's anxiety about medicine back to the mortality of the ageing Nagg and Nell, Adorno accuses Hamm of a kind of magical thinking (i.e. that Hamm believes shirking medicine will allow him to escape his parents' degenerative fate). Adorno's dichotomous use of phrases such as "aggressive impulse of healthy common sense" indicates his view that one's appeal to the antidote results in its very opposite. He sees the pursuit of healthiness as an illness in itself:

> If one of Beckett's later plays revolves around the imago of the tape recorder, the language of *Endgame* is reminiscent of the abominable party game in which the nonsense talked at a party is secretly taped and then played back to the guests to humiliate them. The shock, which people scurry away from in embarrassed giggles, is developed in full in Beckett's work. Just as after an intensive reading of Kafka alert experience thinks it sees situations from his novels

> everywhere, so Beckett's language effects a healing disease in the sick person: the person who listens to himself talk starts to worry that he sounds the same way. (262).

Adorno's inversion of the pursuit of health within this passage has negative consequences for his idea that Beckett's fiction is a domain for representing and resisting false consciousness – especially the false consciousness of the therapeutic situation itself. The construction "healing disease" distils the following antimony: whilst *Endgame* may have acted like a tape recorder in the sense that Beckett's fiction allows the "sick person" to hear their own voice and reflect upon their sickness, the contradictory phrase "healing disease" suggests that any kind of respite is yet another form of disease. In this way, Adorno is challenging the reading that Beckett's texts could be therapeutic, instead interpreting the drive towards therapy as somehow ending full circle back to illness, just as *The Unnamable*'s narrator's escape from its bad situation loops back to that very same situation.[173]

*Endgame* itself shows that even if there ever existed a potential cure for its characters' pains, the play's ending gives no illusion that this respite remains possible anymore. When the time for the pain-killer finally arrives, Clov answers Hamm's question in the following exchange:

> HAMM: Is it not time for my pain-killer?
>
> CLOV: Yes.
>
> HAMM: Ah! At last! Give it to me! Quick!
>
> [*Pause.*]
>
> CLOV: There's no more pain-killer.
>
> [*Pause*.]
>
> HAMM [*Appalled*]: Good . . . ! [*Pause.*] No more pain-killer!
>
> CLOV: No more pain-killer. You'll never get any more pain-killer.
>
> [*Pause*.]
>
> HAMM: But the little round box. It was full!
>
> CLOV: Yes. But now it's empty.

[173] See Beckett's *The Unnamable* (304).

> [*Pause.* CLOV *starts to move about the room. He is looking for a place to put down the alarm-clock.*]" (Beckett, *Endgame* 42-43).

Despite otherwise critiquing Hamm's obsession with his health, Adorno still admits that the scene of the medicine running out is significant: "Representing the catastrophe, for instance, is the announcement that there are no more painkillers." (*NTL1* 260). Clov's matter-of-fact announcement that "[t]here's no more pain-killer" is rather chilling in its finality. For Adorno, this empty pain-killer box is a stand-in for the catastrophe partly because it comes in the form of a mere everyday object rather than a grand apocalyptic event (an aspect which Adorno considers all the more "apocalyptic" for its ordinariness, in its mere "shrugging of the shoulders" [262]). But Adorno also judges this situation as catastrophic because it spells out the failure of the appeal to medical paraphernalia to properly resolve the situation. The specificity of the pain-killer as the play's medication of choice heightens this failure for Adorno because it represents a mere pallative, or a temporary solution that numbs the pain rather than curing its source. The announcement that there is no more pain-killer spells the end of any hope that Hamm's and Clov's ailments might be cured precisely because this remaining inadequate option has also become exhausted.

Beckett's play itself resists the idea that it offers any critical insights. *Endgame*'s language of bodily impairment is often used to describe the impairment of one's critical faculties. For example, Clov's observation that "No one that ever lived ever thought so crooked as we" emphatically invokes the language of disability ("crooked") to describe his and Hamm's thoughts (Beckett, *Endgame* 11). This physical-mental dynamic is affirmed when Clov declares: "Ah good. [*He starts pacing to and fro, his eyes fixed on the ground, his hands behind his back. He halts*.] The pains in my legs! It's unbelievable! Soon I won't be able to think any more." (29). Clov implies that the pains emanating from his legs, a physical ailment, will cause his critical faculties to become hopeless. This situation greatly impacts Adorno's hope that he might use *Endgame* for his critical theory, a problem which is evident when Hamm says a line which may be his own words, or more likely a recollection: "Use your head, can't you, use your head, you're on earth, there's no cure for that!" (41). In this sarcastic, comedic declaration, Hamm discounts the notion that invoking one's critical faculties will be enough

to change their material situation. Their position on earth is posed as an incurable disease that no mental exercise will provide an escape from. Beckett's characterisation of the thinking process thereby complicates one of Adorno's main theses about *Endgame*: that we can understand the play in the sense of trying to find some "meaning" behind its very meaninglessness (*NTL1* 261). And yet if we look at the title of Adorno's essay on this play more closely, "Versuch, das Endspiel zu verstehen", we see that it qualifies that Adorno is merely "trying*"* ["*versuch*"] to understand Beckett's text, not that this process of understanding is successful. Adorno's declaration that Beckett's play is essentially meaningless hints that he considers his attempt to understand ["*verstehen*"] Beckett's texts to be a failure (261).

Adorno's last hope appears to fall short, confirming his fear that even Beckettian modernism might not be enough to prevent the particular from getting subsumed into the universal. And it is Adorno's appropriation of *Hamlet* for his reading of *Endgame* that suggests this resignation. Just as Adorno interprets the line "outside of here it's death" as a way of understanding death as the totalising force that touches everything in the play, he hints at another troubling conclusion: that dialectical thinking is no longer possible (Beckett, *Endgame* 9). Adorno takes Hamlet's famous line "to be or not to be" and shapes it into his own formulation: "to croak or to croak" ["*Krepieren oder Krepieren*"]. (Shakespeare 239; Adorno, *NTL1* 267 and *Versuch* 312). Importantly, the German word for "croak" ["*Krepieren*"] retains the deathly denotation of its English equivalent. Therefore, Adorno selects a phrase that is a question, that retains a relationship between two opposites, and that contains a negation. He then turns this phrase into the otherwise unescapable situation in which both options – namely, to die – are identical. This emphasis on the failure of any way out of this bad situation is summed up by Adorno's description of Hamm and Clov's "escape" as "not knowing whether it will only prolong life and agony or put an end to both of them in absolute annihilation" (*NTL1* 258). Adorno's conclusion in "Trying to Understand Endgame" suggest that he considered his therapeutic reading of Beckett to be a failure, mocked by the fact that all 'ways out' and all choices merely lead to false consciousness, as represented by the false choice between dying or dying. Yet this double bind did not stop Adorno from continuing to appeal to Beckett in his theory. We will now see how Adorno

suggests that the self-consciousness of Beckett's work about the failure of its therapeutic power was its critical quality.

**3. A Critical Failed Therapy?**

At the end of his notes to *The Unnamable,* Adorno offers a hopeful interpretation of Beckett's literature by suggesting that its failure to be therapeutic is a blessing rather than a curse: "Is nothingness the same as nothing? Everything in [Beckett] revolves around that. Absolute discardment, because there is hope only where nothing is retained. The fullness of nothingness." ("Notes on Beckett" 178). If we briefly reference the problem we just explored in the last section, Adorno suggested that it was impossible to use Beckett's novel for a therapeutic project beyond the very point of that project's failure – mainly due to the logical impossibility of being able to escape a situation of *total* annihilation. This fear of nothingness bears upon his anxiety that even Beckettian literature may not be able to readdress the false therapeutic situation and thereby broach the problem of false consciousness (for example, he was particularly concerned about the inability to talk about wartime experiences).[174] Yet by posing the question "Is nothingness the same as nothing?" ["*Ist das Nichts gleich nichts*?"], Adorno suddenly puts pressure on the idea of whether "nothingness" ["*das Nichts*"] is truly "nothing" ["*nichts*"] (*Frankfurter* 73). This distinction is illuminated by a remark in Adorno's seventeenth lecture on metaphysics on 27 July 1965, where he argues that: "[*The Unnamable*] revolves around the question [of] what nothingness actually contains; the question, one might say, of a topography of the void. This work is really an attempt so to conceive nothingness that it is, at the same time, not *merely* nothingness, but to do so within complete negativity." (*Metaphysics* 135-36). Adorno suggest that the failure of Beckett's work to talk about certain topics does not completely discount its potential to talk about them once again.[175] Adorno challenges the characterisation of "nothingness" as an irrevocable, totalising state where something other than nothingness will never be able to emerge. By instead instilling a notion of a "topography" *within "*complete negativity", Adorno

[174] For one specific case, see Adorno's comment in "Trying to Understand Endgame" on the problem of artistic representation in the sense that art cannot represent a specific, realistic subject matter – for instance, the catastrophe: "Any alleged drama of the atomic age would be a mockery of itself [.]" (*NTL1* 246).
[175] See, for example, Adorno's view that *Endgame* places an "image-ban" on the Holocaust in *Negative Dialectics* (392).

suggests that nothingness has the quality of different layers.[176] By pointing to "the fullness of nothingness" as nothingness' capacity to reflect differences within itself, Adorno reads the Beckettian "void" as a space of "hope" in which something *other* than a complete lack might be glimpsed.

Adorno's more determinate conception of nothingness picks up on one of Beckett's major theses in *The Unnamable*: that even where there is nothingness (or silence), things may be otherwise than total nothingness. As the narrator comments:

> Unfortunately I am afraid, as always, of going on. For to go on means going from here, means finding me, losing me, vanishing and beginning again, a stranger first, then little by little the same as always, in another place, where I shall say I have always been, of which I shall know nothing, being incapable of seeing, moving, thinking, speaking, but of which little by little, in spite of these handicaps, I shall begin to know something, just enough for it to turn out to be the same place as always, the same which seems made for me and does not want me, which I seem to want and do not want, take your choice, which spews me out or swallows me up […] Is there really nothing new to try? (Beckett, *The Unnamable* 304).

The narrative betrays some desire to "go on", a phrase which is repeated in the novel's famous final line: "I'll go on." (418). The narrator's definition of what "go[ing] on" means is generally quite ambiguous. Sometimes this phrase signals the unnamable's desire for a qualitative change, a movement from the point that it is currently stuck so that it can become "a stranger" in "another place". Yet, at other times, the narrator fetishises a sense of *lack,* whether silence or nothingness. For instance, near the novel's closing, the narrator is irritated by the idea that its voice can never reach a state of total silence: "[I] want it to go silent […] it can't, it does for a second, then it starts again, that's not the real silence [.]" (412). But even this moment of frustration reveals some hope that total stasis or even annihilation might be impossible. At one point, the narrator betrays a general desire to move away from the loop that they are trapped in. In this loop, any step forward leads to one's return "to the same place as always", where one remains defined by Mahood/Basil who "heaped stories on

[176] This is reinforced by Adorno's comment that there is no such thing as "merely nothingness", which assigns the concept of nothingness a critical plurality.

my head […] preventing me from saying who I was [.]" (311). The unnamable's admission that it is "unfortunate" that it is too fearful to act upon the notion of "[going] on" suggests that to "go on" is its desired aim. Furthermore, the narrator's question "Is there really nothing new to try?" hints that it ultimately wants to escape this infinite loop by enacting the process of "going on", thereby driving towards a qualitatively new narrative that would allow *l'innommable* to forge its own voice on its own terms.

The dialectical situation of "[going] on" from nothing is best illustrated by the Adornian recourse to the wounded body. Adorno's turn to Beckett's mutilated bodies was in part a reaction to those who had attacked his preference for ostensibly negative modernist literature rather than more directly political or even realistic aesthetics (see his dispute with Lukács in "Chapter 1" and "Chapter 2"). Before Adorno published his major essay on *Endgame,* Lukács had criticised Beckett in *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* [1957]. There, Lukács dismissed Beckettian texts for their "image of utmost human degradation - an idiot's vegetative existence" (*The Meaning* 31).[177] As a response, Adorno's essay "An Open Letter to Rolf Hochhuth" uses the vegetative characters of Nagg and Nell to outline why he favours an absurd, apolitical aesthetic of talking torsos over the more politically committed aesthetic of writers like Brecht and the realism of more naturalistic theatre: "The subjects have become objects to a much greater degree than [Brecht] shows us. From this point of view Beckett's human stumps are more realistic than portraits of reality that already soften it through their pictorial quality." (*NTL2* 234). Although his idea that the very real mutilated body can be transposed into a lacerated literary aesthetic is not without its problems, Adorno suggests that there is more honesty to this process because Beckettian literature's dehumanisation of the human body into "stumps" stages the objectification of the human from a subject into an amputated part (i.e. a torso). He argues that this mutilated artform therefore mediates and embodies topics that otherwise struggle to find expression due to their traumatic nature.

Adorno then fashions these Beckettian textual wounds into a critical apparatus. In his notes to *The Unnamable,* Adorno writes that there is a textual wound at the centre of Beckett's play *Krapp's*

[177] See Joseph Anderton's *Beckett's Creatures* [2016] for a more detailed discussion on Adorno's response to Lukács' criticism of Beckett's "vegetative" characters (10).

*Last Tape*: "[Beckett] has a panic-stricken fear of tape-recordings and suchlike. And yet he wrote *La Dernière Bande.* A hole into the work? All that written as an adjuration: in order not to have to resemble in any way what is presented?" ("Notes on Beckett" 174). Adorno's description of the tape-recorder as a "hole in the work" captures the irony that *Krapp's Last Tape* is centred on "tape-recordings" despite Beckett's unease with the reflective form. On one hand, Adorno argues that Beckett places this "hole" in his play as a gap in which the writer can deposit his fear to avoid it as a kind of psychological textual diversion. Yet on the other, in his description of this gap as an "adjuration" (a communicative device), Adorno suggests that Beckett's omission speaks of the very fear that the playwright had deposited and hoped to bury there. Adorno brings these two sides together in one of his own work's major tropes: the motif of the wound. Adorno explains his investment in this particular motif in *Prisms*, where he says of Kafka's modernist literature: "Instead of curing neurosis, he seeks in it itself the healing force, that of knowledge: the wounds with which, society brands the individual are seen by the latter as ciphers of the social untruth, as the negative of truth." (251). Adorno interprets the literary wound as a negative space that simultaneously stands in for what is neglected from representation whilst also being imbued with that very information. Adorno argues that despite society's "branding" of the body with an unspeakable wound, Beckett's work adopts this laceration as a kind of critical instrument. By describing literature's wounds as a script ("ciphers of untruth"), Adorno suggests that modernist works such as *Krapp's Last Tape* represent a critical site of negative "knowledge". As we discussed in our analysis of Nell in the first chapter (and will discuss in our analysis of Lenina in the next chapter), whilst the wound is usually characterised as a hole, Adorno interprets the gaps and scarred surface of *Krapps' Last Tape* as disruptive devices that challenge the idea that any representation of society is impossible, or the idea that there is merely a totalising, indifferent "nothingness".

Just as Adorno found a strange solace in the very wounded or "repressed" parts of society, he also suggested how psychoanalysis might be useful in its very failure. In "Fragment 25 – Dwarf Fruit" in *Minima Moralia,* Adorno offers the dictum that "In psycho-analysis nothing is true except the exaggerations." (29). This aphorism is of course an exaggeration; Adorno uses hyperbole with the semantic field of exceptionality - "nothing", "except", "exaggerations" - to characterise

psychoanalysis as an extreme method.[178] Yet this topic of "exaggeration" is not a mere rhetorical strategy but characterises how Adorno genuinely treated the psychoanalytic method. This sentence declares that psychoanalysis is only true when it is hyperbolic or a fiction, thereby reading the therapeutic method as something that only offers any methodological use where it fails. This understanding of psychoanalytic exaggeration is embedded in his reading of *Endgame*. For instance, if we turn to Adorno's discussion of the problems of trying to interpret Beckett's play, he comments:

> For since then the society has thrown its *ratio* on the scrap heap and replaced it with virtually unmediated control. Hence interpretation inevitably lags behind Beckett. His dramatic work, precisely by virtue of its restriction to an exploded facticity, surges out beyond facticity and in its enigmatic character calls for interpretation. One could almost say that the criterion of a philosophy whose hour has struck is that it prove equal to this challenge. (*NTL1* 244).

Adorno asserts that it is precisely *Endgame's* "exploded facticity" ["*abgesprengte Faktizität*"] – or the fact that Beckett's art is not making any attempt to represent reality due to the unreal status of reality - that allows for his own critical engagement with the text (*Noten* 284).[179] He contrasts the novel's failure as a therapeutic tool with what it is allegedly "surging beyond": rational thought and normative ways of understanding ("*ratio*"). Adorno holds that rational thought is inferior to fictional psychoanalysis, arguing that rational understanding is in reality its opposite: it is what is discarded on the "scrap heap", "crawling" and lagging "behind" the critical quality of fiction. Adorno's argument that philosophy's (and theory's) "hour has struck" suggests that perhaps theory could one day match literature's ability to provoke truly critical thought by examining its own failures.

Likewise, despite its own hostility towards psychoanalysis, *The Unnamable*'s narrator suggests that one can glimpse the truth in a psychoanalysis that is honest about its uselessness, its falsity, its failure. For example, let us return to the moment when the narrator has just rejected the

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[178] These terms retain the exaggerated tone of the respective words in the original German text (i.e. "*nichts*" ["nothing"], "*wahr*" ["true"] and "*Übertreibungen*" ["exaggerations"]) (Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflexionen* 56).

[179] See Adorno's comment in *Aesthetic Theory* that: "The surplus of reality amounts to its collapse; by striking the subject dead, reality itself becomes deathly; this transition is the artfulness of all antiart, and in Beckett it is pushed to the point of the manifest annihilation of reality." (31).

validity of various psychoanalytic narrative forms such as "analysis" (the act of interpreting the patient's words in therapy), "preamble" (a word often used to preface Freud's dream analysis in *The Interpretation of Dreams*) and "report" (a medical write-up of the patient's narratives and the therapist's diagnoses). *L'innommable* suddenly makes clear that it is precisely this untrue quality that is of some therapeutic use: "Some of this rubbish has come in handy on occasions, I don't deny it, on occasions which would never have arisen if they had left me in peace." (Beckett, *The Unnamable* 300-04). On first reading, Beckett appears to be reducing psychoanalytic interpretation to the lowly status of mere waste or "rubbish", a metaphor for what is untrue. On closer inspection, the narrator betrays an attraction to psychoanalysis as a narrative form that is clearly fictional. The narrator's qualification that this rubbish method "has become handy" suddenly appropriates this otherwise untrue therapeutic approach. The unnamable uses the terms of these inadequate narrative forms to find the words to talk about its broken state as a pragmatic way of representing its truth.

Beckett himself suggested that his work was contending with a kind of representational omission that he intended to offset with a physically scarred, incapacitated act of thinking. In one of his most extensive reflections on his own artistic approach, Beckett told an interviewer:

> My people seem to be falling to bits. […] At the end of my work there's nothing but dust – the namable. In my last book, *L'Innommable* [*The Unnamable*], there's complete disintegration, there's no way to go on. […] I'm working with impotence, ignorance. I don't think impotence has been exploited in the past. There seems to be a kind of aesthetic axiom that expression is achievement - must be achievement. My little exploration is that whole zone of being that has always been set aside by artists as somehow unusable – as something by definition incompatible with art. I think anyone nowadays who pays the slightest attention to his own experience finds it the experience of a non-knower, of a no-can-er [someone who cannot]. (Beckett qtd. in Fletcher 69-70).

Through the spatial image of a "zone […] that has always been set aside by artists as somehow unusable", Beckett addresses what he sees as a representational blind spot by placing "impotency, ignorance" (or physical and mental impairment) at the centre of his art rather than obscuring or

omitting them. Beckett reinforces the psychological implications of his argument - of privileging thought that is seen as "unusual", "non-know[ing] - in texts such as *Endgame.* If we return to our discussion of Clov's comments about his and Hamm's "crooked [thought]" as understanding their cognitive capacity through the language of disability, Beckett's quotation above suggests that this is not to be understood *merely* as an incapacitated form of thinking. Instead, Beckett's literature intimates that mental disability (and, in association, physical disability) resists narratives that cast its resistance to normative ways of thinking as madness.[180] In *The Unnamable,* Beckett's narrator emphasises that in the therapeutic situation, neurosis is one of the only points of resistance that would enable it to tell a story on its own terms: "Ah a nice state they have me in – but still I'm not their creature (not quite, not yet). It's a poor trick that consists in ramming a set of words down your gullet on the principle that you can't bring them up without being branded as belonging to their breed. But I'll fix their gibberish for them. […] Dear incomprehension, it's thanks to you I'll be myself in the end" (327). Here, the narrator speaks of a desire to resist the psychoanalytic narrative that is forced upon it (i.e. to resist the narrative forced down its "gullet"). The narrator suggests that its own "incomprehension", or its refusal to understand, will allow the unnamable to resist the psychoanalyst's determination of its apparent neurosis and, therefore, its identity and its narrative. By reducing "their" (i.e. the analyst's) words into "gibberish", *l'innommable* inverts 'normative' thinking into "gibberish", thereby casting its own crooked thought as the voice of reason.

Adorno considered how this critically incapacitated thinking outlined in Beckett's writings might offer a resistance against the failed, capitalist strain of psychoanalysis that proliferated in America. In *Adorno and Democracy: The American Years* [2016], Shannon Mariotti outlines how Adorno's experience in the United States caused him to suspect that psychoanalysis was an instrument of capitalism rather than an antidote to it. Mariotti explains that American culture not only drove towards curing neurosis, but towards active self-improvement (*Adorno* 79). She makes the case that Adorno saw this unrealistic pursuit of complete happiness under capitalism as essentially the false consciousness of American therapy (79). Adorno certainly bought into the view that psychoanalysis

[180] See Adorno's similar point in his reading of Clov's "crooked thought": "Presence of mind is the proven means of sabotaging reflection." (*NTL1* 273).

was a capitalist instrument when psychoanalysts treated illness as something to be merely eradicated from the therapeutic situation.[181] As Mariotti argues in "Damaged Life as Exuberant Vitality in America" [2009], Adorno held that a more critical psychoanalytic theory would actively and critically engage with the analysand's illness (178). And yet Adorno takes his analysis even further than this conclusion, indicating that it is precisely the failure of the psychoanalytic therapeutic situation that is productive for resisting capitalism's violent impulses. Just as Adorno reads Hamm's story about a "madman" artist as a tale of how schizophrenic, self-reflective thinking captures more of the reality about life than a neurotypical character might do, his analysis of the play's so-called "old cripples" resists the regressiveness of the wellness industry outlined by Mariotti (Beckett, *Endgame* 28; Adorno, *NTL1* 254, 263).[182] As Adorno argues in reference to Nagg and Nell: "The two make their home in trash cans […] 'Today the old people are thrown on the garbage heap,' and it happens. *Endgame* is true gerontology. By the criterion of socially useful labour, which they are no longer capable of, the old people are superfluous and should be tossed aside [.]" (*NTL1* 266). Although this passage describes capitalism's disturbing indifference to those who are no longer "socially useful" to its system (using Hamm as the representation of the young who turn against the failed use values of the old people), implicit in this critique is a more hopeful argument. Rather than just suggesting that the young should recognise the old, Adorno also reasons that if being physically and mentally well provides the system with good workers, then physical and mental disabilities must act as a site of resistance that fights against being co-opted into a bad society.

Adorno draws upon Beckett's *Endgame* to perform a social critique, interpreting the play as a commentary on how neurosis is a systemic problem of a bad world. For instance, consider the shift that Hamm undergoes when he barks the demand "use your head" at several points during the play so

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[181] See Adorno's aphorism "The Health Unto Death" in *Minima Moralia*: "[If] the absolute predominance of the economy did not beggar all attempts at explaining conditions by the psychic life of their victims; and if the psychoanalysts had not long since sworn allegiance to those conditions - such an investigation would needs show the sickness proper to the time to consist precisely in normality. […] Just as the old injustice is not changed by a lavish display of light, air and hygiene, but is in fact concealed by the gleaming transparency of rationalised big business, the inner health of our time has been secured by blocking flight into illness without in the slightest altering its aetiology. The dark closets have been abolished as a troublesome waste of space, and incorporated in the bathroom. What psycho-analysis suspected, before it became itself a part of hygiene, has been confirmed." (58-59).

[182] See Adorno's comment in "Trying to Understand Endgame": "In the realm of schizophrenia, Beckett's drama retains its self-control. It subjects even schizophrenia to reflection." (*NTL1* 254)

that he can order Clov around.[183] In one of the most revealing instances that we discussed in the previous section, Hamm shouts at Clov in a fit of anger: "[*Pause. Violently*.] Use your head, can't you, use your head, you're on earth, there's no cure for that!" (Beckett, *Endgame* 41). This dismissive yet also comedic line indicates that the therapeutic process is ultimately scuppered for the individual; Hamm elaborates on this point by judging Clov's attempt to use his critical faculty ("use your head") as ultimately useless - namely because its situation, "the earth", is implied as being too neurotic for one's head to be anything but neurotic as well. But if we consider this passage more closely, this line also carries the implication that neurosis should not be understood as an intellectual or even moral failing on behalf of Clov as an individual. Adorno highlights this aspect of Beckett's play when he interprets the lines:

> HAMM: You stink already. The whole place stinks of corpses.
>
> CLOV: The whole universe. (29).

Adorno asserts that this passage tells the audience that "Hamm, who responds, 'To hell with the universe,' [rejects the] Absolute, the world becomes hell: nothing exists but it." (*NTL1* 276). By emphasising the fact that Clov sees the destroyed domestic situation as a terminal condition that runs throughout the universe, Adorno draws out from Hamm's line a comedic realisation about the state of the "earth": that the individual's incapacity derives from the whole universe's incapacity, that neurosis is a systemic symptom of capitalism.

In light of this social critique, Adorno holds that the failed therapy is an example *par excellence* of negating false consciousness which gives the reader knowledge of this juncture between Beckett's damaged individuals and their damaged world. Near the end of "Trying to Understand Endgame", Adorno argues: "Where [Hamm and Clov] come closest to the truth, they sense, with double comedy, that their consciousness is false; this is how a situation that can no longer be reached by reflection is reflected". (*NTL1* 274). Even though Adorno has accepted that the process of knowing has become impaired, he does not discount an exceptional type of thinking, or what Beckett would

[183] Hamm makes this comment (or variations of it) at various points in the play (Beckett, *Endgame* 23, 32, 41, 44).

consider "un-know[ing]". Adorno asserts that one of the only escape routes from false consciousness towards truth is found in the very act of knowing that one has false consciousness. This does not mean that a person necessarily suddenly understands, say, the Holocaust, but that the individual becomes aware that there is an omission of information that they are *not* receiving, which provokes them to seek this information somehow. Adorno illustrates this provocation as follows: "Consciousness gets ready to look its own end in the eye, as though it wanted to survive it the way these two have survived the destruction of their world." (275). By comparing the failed reflection's capacity to reflect on its very failure to the "shelter" that Hamm and Clov occupy, Adorno suggests that one's awareness of one's annihilation at least opens up a slight critical juncture between the allegedly all-encompassing world and the wounded party who is aware of their wounded state (245, 270). For Adorno, *Endgame* stages the failure of the therapeutic situation, in which its very failure provokes the analysand to question whether this bad situation is the necessary state of the world and of themselves.[184] By becoming self-conscious that one is a victim of a bad system, the analysand also questions whether something *other* than this situation is possible to pursue – even "in spite of [one's] handicaps." (Beckett, *The Unnamable* 203). Adorno concludes that the *failed* "talking cure" embodies the non-identity between the inadequate, false therapy under capitalism (the object) and what a genuine therapy should be (the concept).[185]

Beckett himself presented the idea that the therapeutic failure was critical in his concept of "[going] on". In a retrospective interview about his period of depression in the 1930s, Beckett reflected that: "After my father's death I had trouble psychologically. The bad years were between

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[184] See Adorno's comment on "authentic psychoanalysis" as that which gives voice to the damage society inflicts onto the individual in "Sociology and Psychology (Part II)" [1968]: "Psychoanalysis in its most authentic and by now already obsolete form comes into its own as a report on the forces of destruction rampant in the individual amidst a destructive society." (n.p.). In *Aesthetic Theory,* Adorno applies this theory to Beckett specifically: "At ground zero, however, where Beckett's plays unfold like forces in infinitesimal physics, a second world of images springs forth, both sad and rich, the concentrate of historical experiences that otherwise, in their immediacy, fail to articulate the essential: the evisceration of subject and reality." (31).

[185] This moment in the novel correlates with Adorno's claim that Beckett's aim for his own fiction is to "almost entirely to express what has been damaged, or […] to express the powerless and oppressed parts of humans [.]" (*Aesthetic*s 71). In this case, otherwise discredited psychoanalytic narratives give voice to mental and physical illnesses that derive from a previous traumatic event. In this respect, the emphasis on retaining the therapeutic potential of fiction could provide an approach for understanding where Beckett's post-war text *The Unnamable* seriously considers itself to be a site for understanding what was suppressed (or deemed weak) under the Nazis – precisely because it was a story.

when I had to crawl home in 1932 and after my father's death in 1933. I'll tell you how it was. And I felt I couldn't go on. It was a strange experience I can't really describe. I found I couldn't go on moving. So I went into the nearest pub and got a drink just to stay still." (Beckett qtd. in Knowlson 167). Beckett appears to be invoking the phrase from the ending of *The Unnamable* ("You must go on. I can't go on. I'll go on.") in order to psychologise it (418). Just as the narrator oscillates between stasis and an impulse to move on, in a letter Beckett wrote around the time of his father's passing, he suggested that the ability to psychologically move on from a taboo subject was scuppered by the failure of therapy: "I can't write about him [.]" (Beckett qtd. in Knowlson 171). This letter indicates that Beckett's writing fails to give voice to what is ineffable: the taboo of his father's death. And yet this passage also indicates that the healing process of Beckett's writing was bound up with the very fact of its impossibility. One can glimpse in Beckett's frustration to talk about his father a critical compulsion to "go on" from this very stasis. By giving a name to his father's death and by pointing to the disabling aspects of his mental illness, Beckett betrays a critical tension: although the 1930s remained an "experience [he] can't really describe" even later on in his life, he still insisted on "[telling] you how it was".

In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno makes at least three references to the French ending of *L'Innommable*: "*je ne peux pas continuer* […] *il faut continuer, je vais continuer*." (Beckett 261-62).[186] In the most illuminating of the three, Adorno sees hope in the hopelessness of the novel's original ending: "The '*Il faut continuer*', the conclusion of Beckett's *The Unnamable*, condenses this antinomy to its essence: that externally art appears impossible while immanently it must be pursued." (*AT* 320). By describing the phrase as a synecdoche for a larger "antinomy", Adorno plays upon the double meaning of "*il faut continuer*" (roughly "we must continue" or "it is necessary to continue" in English) when it is applied to the situation of art and literature in capitalist society. The phrase either represents the idea that art will continue in a state of eternal stasis, or that art can gesture to the qualitatively new, that it can reach to a new place after the Holocaust. By presenting art as a vehicle

[186] See the three references in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* (208, 224, 320). As Stanley E. Gontarski has commented in his *Companion to Samuel Beckett* [2010], it is worth noting that Beckett changed the final line of the French text to its more famous formulation "*il faut continuer*, *je ne pas continuer, je vais continuer*" in the 1970s (253).

for his immanent critique, Adorno places his lot with the latter, presenting art as exception to a general state of stasis in society: “Even given the most extreme reductionism in art's consciousness of needs, the gesture of self-imposed muteness and vanishing, art persists, as in a sort of differential. Because there has not yet been any progress in the world, there is progress in art; ‘*il faut continuer*.’" (208). Adorno’s description of art as a “differential” [“*Differential*”] assigns to Beckett’s literature an exceptional status as a wound that disrupts a static world by pointing to its wounded status, to its failure to speak (*Ästhetische* 310).[187] Adorno pursues the irrational act of deferring to art in its impossibility because it is only within the catastrophic threat of art’s impossibility that Adorno finds a compulsion to “go on”. As he puts it in *Aesthetic Theory*, “[Artworks] must act as if the impossible were for them possible.” (165).

[187] See Adorno’s comment that: “Art is modern art through mimesis of the hardened and alienated; only thereby, and not by the refusal of a mute reality, does art become eloquent [.]” (*AT* 21).

# Chapter 4 - Adorno and Huxley: Reading for Pleasure

On 11 November 1943, Adorno wrote a letter to his parents from his residence in Los Angeles. Amongst his comments, he states: "We too will send off our Christmas things earlier this year: the book by Huxley – from 1928 – is an outstanding extrapolation of the conditions in America, and is sure to be very enjoyable for Oscar." (*Letters* 158).[188] Although it is not fully clear which book Adorno was sending to his father, what this letter does tell us is that Adorno turned to Huxley's fiction to expound upon his own attitudes to American society.[189] Considering the importance of Adorno's American experience to understanding his thoughts on the Anglophone world, it would be remiss not to look at the role of American literature and culture within Adorno's conception of literary modernism. As we illustrated in the introduction to this dissertation, Adorno showed an interest in various Anglo-American writers, from Henry James to T.S. Eliot. But perhaps the most important Anglo-American writer in Adorno's critical thought is Aldous Huxley – a British writer who was resident in the USA for 26 years. Despite Adorno's criticism of American culture and society for playing into false consciousness (which we saw in the previous chapter in the discussion of American therapy), Adorno also located a resistant quality in Huxley's fictionalisation and parody of that very American culture and society. Broadly, this chapter will cover how Adorno draws upon *Brave New World* to formulate a resistant strategy of experiencing pleasure in an otherwise individualistic, unpleasurable capitalist society.

The shape of Adorno's engagement with Huxley can be illustrated by the presence of the author in Adorno's archive. Adorno's most extensive and well-known work on the writer is an essay about *Brave New World* entitled "Aldous Huxley and Utopia" ["Aldous Huxley und die Utopie"]

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[188] Adorno makes three other references to Huxley in his letters to his parents (*Letters* 158, 235, 338, 340).

[189] The editors of *Letters to His Parents,* Christoph Gödde und Henri Lonitz, suggest that "Aldous Huxley's novel *Point Counter Point*, published in 1928, does not fit the characterisation here. The reference is most likely to *Brave New World*, first published in 1932." (Gödde and Lonitz qtd. in Adorno, *Letters* 158). As we will see, Adorno certainly took *Brave New World* as a reflection of the conditions in America and first wrote his essay "Aldous Huxley and Utopia" in 1942. However, if we look at Adorno's library, we can see that he gifted Gretel a copy of *Point Counter Point* [1928] in 1942 according to a dedication. Therefore, it is not unthinkable that Adorno might have gifted his father the same text the following year - after all, even if it is unconventional interpretation of the text in question, it is not unusual for Adorno to interpret a book unfaithfully (see "Chapter 2" on Joyce).

[1942, 1955].[190] Whilst this piece has gained the most scholarly attention and will be the focus of this chapter, it is important to note that Adorno also made some shorter references to the writer in "The Schema of Mass Culture" (*The Culture* 93, 97), *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Adorno and Horkheimer xvii), *Minima Moralia* (Adorno 148-50, 242), "Valéry's Deviations" (*NTL1* 57), "Trying to Understand Endgame" (*NTL1* 263)**,** *The Stars Down to Earth* (176-77), *The Jargon of Authenticity* (17), *History and Freedom* (5-6), *Introduction to Sociology* (58), and *Aesthetic Theory* (257, 281). Just as Huxley features in a range of Adorno's texts, Adorno was familiar with a number of Huxley's works. In "Aldous Huxley and Utopia", Adorno compares *Brave New World* with Huxley's later work *Ape and Essence* [1942] (*Prisms* 115), and in *Against Epistemology* [1956]*,* Adorno takes a quotation from Huxley's novel *Eyeless in Gaza* [1936] to illustrate Husserl's conception of "things themselves" (199).[191] Meanwhile, in what exists of Adorno's library, there is an English-language edition of *Point Counter Point* from 1928, an English-language edition of *Those Barren Leaves* from 1936 and an English-language edition of the short story collection *Brief Candles: Stories* published in 1935.[192] There is also evidence that Adorno was aware of Huxley's non-fiction writings. For example, in "Fetish Character in Music and Regression of Listening", Adorno states: "In one of his essays, Aldous Huxley has raised the question of who, in a place of amusement, is really being amused. With the same justice, it can be asked whom music for entertainment still entertains." (*Essays* 27). Even though Adorno does not state the title of the essay in question, Richard Leppert has suggested that Huxley's "Work and Leisure" [1925] or "The Problem of Leisure" [1932] are the most likely candidates (315).

The fact that Adorno was interested in Huxley is especially striking when we consider how the two held similar opinions on American society. Like Adorno, Huxley had an ambivalent relationship with the US and its culture. Born in England in 1894, Huxley moved to America in 1937

[190] Adorno wrote the essay in 1942 and published it in *Prisms* in 1955.
[191] Adorno also mentions Huxley in another place in *Against Epistemology*: "Huxley is ironically correct when he passes thinkers in review and picks out his *philosophia perennis* from what they have in common." (15-16). Whilst it is not clear if Adorno is referring to a particular work by Huxley, the reference to the writer's "*philosophia perennis*" suggests that Adorno may have been riffing on the title of Huxley's *The Perennial Philosophy* [1942].
[192] Adorno's copy of *Point Counter Point* was published in New York by Modern Library in 1928, his copy of *Those Barren Leaves* was published in London by Chatto and Windus in 1936, and his copy of *Brief Candles: Stories* was published in Hamburg by Albatross in 1935.

and lived there until his death in 1963.[193] However, when Huxley first visited the country in 1926, he had made it clear that he had quite mixed feelings about it. Although there is a palpable sense of awe in his account of the richest country on earth, Huxley was critical of the nakedly consumerist culture that he saw in Los Angeles: "And what joy! The joy of rushing about, of always being busy, of having no time to think, of being too rich to doubt." (*Jesting Pilate* 300). This critical perspective from his earlier visit provided material for his famous novel *Brave New World* [1932], a parody of American society, with its references to movies, self-medication and Henry Ford.[194] However, as his eventual move to America demonstrates, Huxley would eventually embrace some of the aspects of American life that he had previously found unpalatable – whether writing screenplays for Hollywood movies or taking drugs.[195] Adorno's essay "Aldous Huxley and Utopia" largely assesses Huxley's attitude to America by focusing on the writer's earlier, more negative comments on American mass culture in *Brave New World.* For example, near the beginning of his essay, Adorno comments: "Just as the world-state of *Brave New World* knows only artificially maintained differences between the golf courses and experimental stations of Mombasa, London, and the North Pole, Americanism, the butt of parody, has taken over the world." (*Prisms* 98). Adorno's interest in this particular novel is revealing in two senses. First, it reveals what Adorno finds most and least attractive in Huxley's formulation of America. Secondly, Adorno's positions on the culture industry were revealingly anticipated by Huxley's parodies of the country in his early work.

If we examine the existing secondary literature on Adorno's "Aldous Huxley and Utopia", we can see that many scholars have noticed that Huxley and Adorno shared similar views on mass culture. The most illuminating studies on this issue include Christoph Bode's *Aldous Huxley: 'Brave*

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[193] Incidentally, Huxley moved to America the year before Adorno would.

[194] There is plenty of evidence that Huxley 'Americanised' his novel. For more information, see Jerome Meckier's article "Aldous Huxley's Americanisation of the 'Brave New World' Typescript" [2002] (427-60).

[195] It is important to note that whilst Adorno is generally responding to Huxley's *earlier* writings on pleasure, culture and America, Huxley's views on these subjects would undergo various changes over time (which is characteristic of Huxley's shifting opinions on a great variety of subjects over the course of his life, whether drugs or religion). Indeed, as two famous émigrés who lived in California, it is perhaps no surprise that both Huxley and Adorno actually shared a complex, ambivalent relationship to American and its culture. Once Huxley was living in America, he lived in Hollywood, contributed to film screenplays and famously took part in university experiments on psychedelic drugs. The fact that Adorno is largely discussing small snapshots of Huxley's opinions gives some credence to Andrzej Gąsiorek's argument in "'Words Without Reason': State Power and the Moral Life in Brave New World" [2016] that Adorno neutralises the complexities of Huxley's argument (222).

*New World'* [1985] (139), Peter U. Hohendahl's "The Displaced Intellectual? Adorno's American Years Revisited" [1992] (78), Robert S. Baker's "The Nightmare of the Frankfurt School: The Marquis de Sade and the Problem of Modernity in Aldous Huxley's Dystopian Narrative" [1995] (246-47), June Deery's "Brave New World, the Sequel: Huxley and Contemporary Film" [2005] (183), Genevieve Abravanel's *Americanizing Britain: The Rise of Modernism in the Age of the Entertainment Empire* [2012] (42), and Jonathan Greenberg and Nathan Waddell's introduction to the edited collection *Brave New World: Contexts and Legacies* [2016] (5). Some of these critics go so far as to say that Huxley influenced Adorno's thoughts on the culture industry.[196] Whilst the extent of Huxley's influence on, say, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, would be difficult to prove, we can say with certainty that Adorno drew upon *Brave New World* in an essay that he wrote for a 1942 seminar on Huxley and the theory of needs (but more on this later). He used the novel to illustrate modern mass culture's role in promoting false consciousness and, in turn, he also used the text to oppose that very false consciousness.[197]

One of the core similarities between Huxley's and Adorno's critiques of mass culture is their idea that mass culture impairs true pleasure. Born to a wealthy family of famous intellectuals, Huxley's early writings were inflected by a rather elitist ideal of what constituted good art. Huxley's account of American culture in *Jesting Pilate* and *Brave New World* reflects a wider anxiety about mass culture in his non-fiction writings from the 1920s and early 1930s. In a 1933 talk entitled "A

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[196] See, for example, Robert S. Baker's comment in "Science and Modernity in Aldous Huxley's Interwar Essays and Novels" [2001]: "Following the lead of Raymond Geuss, Richard Rorty has endorsed the notion that Huxley's *Brave New World* is the 'nightmare which haunts the Frankfurt School'. The origins of this judgement are traceable, in part, to Theodor Adorno's criticism of what he regarded as Huxley's marriage of excessive pessimism with a religious form of transcendence. Adorno's reading of Huxley is too reductive; indeed, Huxley's writings of the 1930s anticipate many of the key ideas of Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*." (38). Following Geuss, Rorty and Baker, David Garrett Izzo makes an even more forceful claim in *The Influence of Mysticism on 20th Century British and American Literature* [2009] that Huxley directly influenced Adorno (76). However, Garrett Izzo supports his argument only with the similarities that he perceives between Adorno's work on the culture industry and Huxley's fiction and non-fiction. Angela Holzer has since provided more hard evidence of Adorno as a *reader* of Huxley's writings in "To Reflect, to Sit Down: The Hinzutretende and Huxleyan Characters in Horkheimer's and Adorno's Philosophy" [2014]. There, Holzer points out that Adorno's letters demonstrate that he read more than *Brave New World* alone (121). It is important to note, however, that Holzer herself concedes that it is "quite difficult to gauge" the extent of Huxley's influence on Adorno's thought (120).

[197] In June 1942, members of the Frankfurt school met up to discuss Aldous Huxley's novel and Henry A. Wallace's notion that technology could be used to distribute milk rations to every human being. Please see the final section of this chapter for my discussion of Adorno's thoughts on these themes.

Defence of the Intellect", Huxley held that a certain distracting quality of contemporary mass culture prevented consumers from experiencing the higher, genuine pleasure of modern art that was enjoyed by refined thinkers (n.p.). This anxiety would feed into Huxley's life-long fear that totalitarian societal structures would control the masses in liberal democracies – in America's case, Huxley worried that dictators would use popular culture to distract the average citizen from realising their terrible conditions (*BNWR* 14). Adorno's essays on the culture industry from the 1940s would go onto make a similar argument, but with more of a Marxist inflection. Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* famously uses the development of mass culture in America's advanced capitalism to argue that the culture industry had robbed the individual of pleasure. Like Huxley, Adorno and Horkheimer blame the *distracting* character of entertainment as an empty diversion that reinforces the false consciousness of individuals (*Dialectic* 133). Adorno and Horkheimer also define distraction in terms of pleasure, arguing that the masses' inability to perceive their oppression under capitalism should be understood as a tragedy of living in an unpleasurable society (55).[198] As Rebecca Frost and other scholars have noted, the final part of Adorno's essay on *Brave New World* reveals that the theorist is especially invested in *sexual* pleasure (Frost, "Huxley's" 449).[199] As we shall see, Adorno's focus on sexual pleasure in Huxley's novel actually challenges some widely-held narratives about Adorno's theories of mass culture and sexuality.

Adorno and Huxley were also occupied by an issue that was directly connected to this problem of pleasure. Both figures suggested that mass culture threatened what they conceived to be a desirable, rational individualism.[200] Just like his approach to pleasure, Huxley's conception of

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[198] Of course, Adorno and Horkheimer are not necessarily disputing the idea that mass culture can give pleasure, but they find issue with how this pleasure is largely inadequate or used for unpleasurable ends on behalf of capitalism.

[199] Rebecca Frost is the foremost scholar on Adorno's attraction to Huxley's explication of the problem of pleasure. She has offered several studies of the theme of pleasure in Adorno's essay on Huxley; see, for example, her article "Huxley's Feelies: The Cinema of Sensation in 'Brave New World'" [2006], her book *The Problem with Pleasure: Modernism and Its Discontents* [2015] and her chapter "The Pleasures of Dystopia" [2016] ("Huxley's" 448, *The Problem* 135, and "The Pleasures" 75). Robert Hullot-Kentor (249), James Schmidt (149), Ahmed Elbeshlawy (65-66) and Alan How (38) have all shown how Adorno's reading of Lenina's sexuality in *Brave New World* reflects on his broader attitudes to sexual pleasure.

[200] Angela Holzer's chapter "To Reflect, to Sit Down: The Hinzutretende and Huxleyan Characters in Horkheimer's and Adorno's Philosophy" [2008] and Iain Macdonald's chapter "Adorno and Literature" [2018] also discuss Adorno's critique of Huxley's individualism, although not in the same collectivist, sexualised way that I have identified in this chapter (Holzer 121; Macdonald 369).

individualism was shaped by his own upper class, academic background. For example, although Huxley was haunted by the fear that Western "bourgeois democracies" were being primed into becoming totalitarian societies (i.e. with top-down structures that controlled the masses), he did sometimes entertain the idea that society should be run by an "aristocracy of intellect" (*Ends* 40-41 and "The Outlook" 192). This position was influenced by his view that the corruption of pleasure in modern culture was connected to the denigration of the intellect. Huxley argued that the largely distracting and inferior quality of mass culture did not adequately exercise the mind and had led to a proliferation of consumers who no longer used reason, but instead fell for the emotive, false pleasures of commercialised culture (*BNWR* 19).[201] Adorno shared Huxley's idea that individualism centres on a self-aware figure from the ruling classes. However, Adorno's thoughts about individualism often presents this figure specifically (yet also rather vaguely) as a *bourgeois* individual.[202] For instance, Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* [1944] invokes the myth of Odysseus and the Sirens as "a prescient allegory of the dialectic of enlightenment" which illustrates the rise and fall of the bourgeois individual as the figurehead of capitalist society (23, 27).[203] Adorno and Horkheimer begin with the premise that the Enlightenment was characterised by the birth of an *individual,* self-conscious human who came about by dominating and, therefore, distinguishing itself from nature with its instrumental reason, or cunning. Although bourgeois society viewed itself as enlightened and rational in its mastery of the world, Adorno and Horkheimer suggest that the individual's instinct for dominating nature would eventually lead to the domination and dissolution of the thinking individual itself (25-31).[204] However, Adorno bought into an ambivalent idea of individualism: whilst he

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[201] In *Brave New World Revisited,* Huxley discusses how advertisers exploit emotions, "the quieter forms of irrationality" (19).

[202] To an extent, the class politics of Adorno's and Huxley's respective formulations of the individual are quite muddied. Whilst *Brave New World* is in part a criticism of bourgeois decadence, Huxley did sometimes describe his outlook as "bourgeois" (*Selected Letters* 74). Huxley's views on culture and individualism often accord with specifically bourgeois attitudes towards aesthetic taste and intellectual cultivation – for example, see Huxley's comments on the bourgeoisie and Marxism in *The Collected Works of Aldous Huxley: Vol 18* [1959]: "A reason, according to certain Marxian theorists, for disparaging love. For a thing which can exist only when there is a genteel sufficiency is bourgeois; and what is bourgeois must be bad." (175). Nevertheless, this comment betrays the gulf between Adorno's Marxist reading of Huxley's work and Huxley's critiques of Marxism.

[203] Adorno and Horkheimer goes so far as to characterise *The Odyssey* as one of the earliest representative documents of bourgeois Western civilization" (*Dialectic* xviii).

[204] As Adorno and Horkheimer argue: "In mind's self-recognition as nature divided from itself, nature, as in prehistory, is calling to itself, but no longer directly by its supposed name, which, in the guise of mana, means omnipotence, but as something blind and mutilated. In the mastery of nature, without which mind does not exist,

demonstrated that the bourgeois individual drives the very demise of itself in *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* in *Minima Moralia* he puts faith in the individual as the agent who can critique capitalism, finding a certain redemptive pleasure in the act of thinking negatively (17-18). Inevitably, Adorno presents a generally vague idea of individualism that neither tells us *how* exactly the individual goes from a rational being to a husk of a being who can no longer critique society, nor how the individual can necessarily get out of the bind of mastering nature and, in turn, itself. Yet Adorno's vagueness also helps us to see that his approach to individualism in his essay on Huxley has not been fully grasped in its full complexity in the scholarship.

Whilst scholars have picked up on the fact that Adorno's reading of *Brave New World* is rather surprising because it does not condemn the pornographic sexuality of the main female character Lenina as a mere product of a regressive capitalist society, they have not explored how this reading bears upon Adorno's view of the intersection between pleasure and individualism. For example, Rebecca Frost has noted that Adorno surprisingly suggests that Lenina is not supposed to be completely repugnant to the reader – unlike Huxley, who presents her as a parody of the false pleasures of contemporary capitalism ("The Pleasures" 75). However, Frost does not explore how Adorno's appeal to Lenina as a representation of genuine pleasure in an otherwise unpleasurable society evokes his complex, ambivalent attitude to individualism. In general, Adorno was ambivalent about the individualistic mores of his age; whilst his theory is committed to the (bourgeois) ideal of rational autonomy, it remains sceptical of the ways in which reason and autonomy are construed in capitalist society and bourgeois culture. His turn to Lenina is one example of where Adorno constantly oscillates between these two positions on individualism. On one hand, Adorno genuinely considers that Huxley's attempt to resurrect a certain conception of the rational individual might help to negate the false consciousness of society. On the other hand, Adorno's appeal to sex as a point of resistance suggests that he also entertains the critical potential of self-annihilation through an act of collective pleasure.

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enslavement to nature persists. By modestly confessing itself to be power and thus being taken back into nature, mind rids itself of the very claim to mastery which had enslaved it to nature." (*Dialectic* 31). See also my discussion on reification in "Chapter 1" for Adorno's more in-depth discussion of the mechanics of the dialectic of enlightenment.

The scholarship has also glossed over how Adorno's reading of the critical, pleasurable potential of *Brave New World* bears upon the critical place of genre fiction in his theory.[205] Adorno associated many pieces of genre fiction – especially detective stories – with pleasure. For instance, Stefan Müller-Doohm has shown that Adorno enjoyed reading detective novels into the night with Kracauer (49). Adorno would have been well acquainted with Kracauer's famous study *Detective Novel* [*Der Detektiv-Roman: Ein philosophischer Traktat*] which the author had dedicated to him. Published posthumously, Kracauer's work argued that detective fiction, even as a mass cultural form, could provide a critical insight into capitalism (*Der Detektiv* 9-49). Adorno's interest in *Brave New World* challenges the idea that he only considered the high, Anglophone modernism of Beckett or Joyce of being capable of critiquing capitalism's false consciousness. Instead, certain popular cultural forms could also be modernist in Adorno's eyes – that is to say, that they could also possess a cognitive and critical function.

This chapter will outline Adorno's consideration of whether Huxley might offer a workable response to capitalism's mutilation of pleasure, tracking Adorno's move from entertaining Huxley's veneration of the cultivated individual to his negation of such individualism through sexual pleasure. Specifically, this chapter argues that Adorno turns to Huxley's *Brave New World* as a text that could counter false consciousness (and, dialectically, inspire the pleasure of thinking again) because the character of Lenina offers a polyamorous, self-effacing sexual pleasure that throws off the reins of instrumental reason. I will achieve this reading by examining Adorno's essay "Aldous Huxley and Utopia" next to Huxley's *Brave New World,* alongside other writings by Adorno, Huxley and secondary critics. The structure of my chapter will be as follows:

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[205] In particular, I aim to build upon Robert W. Witkin's approach in *Adorno on Popular Culture* [2003] which not only compares Huxley's and Adorno's similar imaginations of a totalitarian future, but crucially emphasises Adorno's dialectical attitude to popular fiction: "Adorno takes it for granted that the arts, both 'serious' and popular, are constitutive elements in the formation of mind and spirit. […] His theory effectively polarizes artworks, indeed cultural forms generally, by dividing them between two categories, those that speak to the self-formation of the subject and those that undermine any such process." (6). By emphasising the significance of Adorno's use of a science fiction novel as a tool for critiquing the problems of pleasure and needs, this chapter will help to challenge the often narrow presentation of the writers that Adorno would deem 'critical' (read: modernist) beyond the usual suspects of Kafka, Mann and Beckett.

In the first section, I outline how Adorno and Huxley share strikingly similar concerns about the instrumentalisation of pleasure in the twentieth-century culture industry. Both figures share the anxiety that capitalism uses a degenerate, mass culture as a tool of false consciousness to reduce the individual into a part of the system so that they cannot see nor resist their own deindividualisation. Second, I will look at how Adorno entertains Huxley's idea that his notion of individualism can resist this deindividualisation and, in turn, the problem of pleasure's debasement under capitalism. In the third section, I examine how Adorno problematises Huxley's individualism, arguing that it reinforces the problems of bourgeois individualism and minimises the importance of pleasure in society. In the final section, I will show how Adorno reveals his own ambivalent attitude to individualism when he turns to a more collective line of resistance to capitalism's mutilation of pleasure. By criticising Huxley's scepticism of a society that meets the needs of everyone, Adorno opposes Huxley's reactionary characterisation of Lenina as the representative of a degenerate, pornographic mass culture. Adorno reads Lenina instead as the symbol of a resistant and collective pleasure that dissolves the individual and negates an otherwise unpleasurable society. I end by demonstrating how Adorno's use of Lenina's libertine sexuality evokes the ambivalence of his attitude to individualism. Although Adorno is undeniably attracted to the promise of redemption found in the figure of the thinking individual within capitalism, he is also attracted to the annihilation of individuality found in the novel's unfettered, collective sexuality. And yet, just as he turns to this self-effacing sexuality as a way of recuperating pleasure in an unpleasurable society, he sees this annihilation as the very route to the pleasure of thinking again.

This chapter will disclose how Adorno's defence of the depiction of pleasure in *Brave New World* disrupts several key preconceptions of his critical theory itself. Adorno's conclusion - that the book's promiscuous figure of Lenina represents the ideal form of pleasure (i.e. complete sexual self-abandonment) – not only offers a surprising intervention into what we currently understand of Adorno's admittedly vague conception of individualism by emphasising his ambivalent position, but also demonstrates that Adorno sought a redemptive pleasure in sex and certain pieces of popular fiction.

**1. Huxley and Adorno on the Problem of Pleasure**

In *Brave New World Revisited,* Aldous Huxley reflects that he used his novel to pose pleasure in its modern form as a serious *problem.* Huxley claims that his fiction had successfully predicted the future of societal control, proving more accurate than even Orwell's negative utopia: "The society described in *Brave New World* is a world-state, in which war has been eliminated and where the first aim of the rulers is at all costs to keep their subjects from making trouble. […] In *1984* the lust for power is satisfied by inflicting pain; in *Brave New World*, by inflicting a hardly less humiliating pleasure." (*BNWR* 13). Here, Huxley argues that although his novel does not provide an order that is as overtly violent as the Oceania state in *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* his own imaginary state had anticipated how false pleasure would become the instrument of covert tyranny even in peacetime. In his essay "Pleasures" [1923], Huxley had already identified "pleasure" as perhaps the most damning, "deadly" facet of "modern civilisation", even deadlier than war (355). This statement should be understood as distinguishing between two types of pleasure. As he elaborates: "'Pleasure' (I place the word between inverted commas to show that I mean, not real pleasure, but the organised activities officially known by the same name) 'pleasure' - what nightmare visions the word evokes!" (355). Huxley emphasises that he is not necessarily disregarding the notion of pleasure wholesale (although, as we will see later, he is ambivalent even towards genuine pleasure), but its current iteration that the masses mistake for "real pleasure". His construction of an imaginary regime that espouses a "hardly less humiliating pleasure" parodies what he considers to be modern society's use of *false* pleasure as a mechanism for social control in place of a genuine, cultivated pleasure. As we will see with Adorno, Huxley exposes his confidence in his own ability to distinguish true pleasures from false ones without necessarily questioning the tenability of this exercise, nor how much his own taste determines what he considers to be truly pleasurable (or not).

Huxley holds that false pleasure is connected to a cultural problem: namely, the regressive state of modern mass culture. Huxley outlines the state of modern pleasure in a character's excited description of the "Feelies", a 3D cinematic experience in *Brave New World* that gives viewers aural, visual and even haptic pleasure when they hold onto the metal knobs on their seats: "'There's a love

scene on a bearskin rug; they say it's marvellous. Every hair of the bear reproduced. The most amazing tactual effects.'" (39). Whilst Huxley uses the pornographic content to comment on how film appeals to the lowest common denominator, it is the character's reconstruction of the camera's close-up of the rug's hair that truly emphasises the degeneration that Huxley associates with modern entertainment. The transition from the sexual act itself to an insignificant detail illustrates the hollowness of pleasure in modern culture (at least, that Huxley perceives in it). This hollowness is reinforced by the fact that the film's immersive quality is a mere reproduction of a sexual experience rather than an experience of the real thing itself.

The Feelies are clearly a parody of the cinema of Huxley's day and function as a broader critique of the modern entertainment industry. As Huxley had stated earlier in his essay "The Spread of Bad Art" [1925]:

> Let us [begin] with the obvious. There is more bad art in 1925 than there was in 1625 for the simple reason that there are many more people in the world than there were then, and these people can almost all read and write and that they dispose of a, comparatively speaking, ample leisure. That leisure has got to be made tolerable. The traditional arts of self-amusement have been mostly lost; education and a snobbish desire to imitate the rich and cultured have killed the morris, the maypole, the folk-song, the mummers. Nor is it possible, as a matter of fact, to practise most of these entertainments in the crowded cities in which the great mass of human beings now live. (167).

As a later scene between Mond and the Savage shows, Huxley takes for granted the superiority of older art forms (e.g. Shakespeare) against the apparent inferiority of modern art (e.g. the Feelies): "'Othello's good, Othello's better than those feelies.' 'Of course it is,' the Controller agreed. 'But that's the price we have to pay for stability. You've got to choose between happiness and what people used to call high art. We've sacrificed the high art. We have the feelies and the scent organ instead.'" (*BNW* 260). This exchange is predicated on Huxley's view that older art tended to demand interpretative work from the creator and the viewer. In contrast, Huxley describes the twentieth-century popular culture of cinema, mass paperbacks or merry-go-rounds with pejorative descriptions

such as “organised”, “ready-made” and “passiv[e]” (“Pleasures” 336, 355). These adjectives evoke Huxley’s conception of modern culture as a passive, mass form that does not give authentic pleasure. To some extent, he defines ‘mass’ culture as something that took on the mechanical character of factories, thereby impairing the individual’s intellectual engagement with such diversions. As John’s and Mond’s comparisons of the “high art” of Shakespeare with the Feelies show, Huxley’s understanding of the mass character of art is somewhat grounded in his view that adapting art for “the great mass of human beings” had betrayed the intellectual work he had defined as a requirement of the majority of good art.[206] But Huxley would contend that his problem with “mass” art is less concerned with artistic elitism than his privileging of the individual over the collective.[207] Huxley’s inclusion of the low-brow, less intellectual folk tradition of, say, morris dancing in his definition of good art owes to the idea that, even with his unease with the top-down feudal structure of village life, these cultural practices were not yet products of what he deems an even more intense feudalism of the centralised, industrial city (*BNWR* 36, 149).

Huxley’s thoughts about modern culture’s degeneration are tied to an even more pressing problem for him: the *distraction* of contemporary life. Huxley defines “distraction” as thought that has diverged from its proper objective of critical engagement and self-reflection (*BNWR* 95).[208] *Brave New World* offers numerous examples of “distractions” which lead to a state of pleasure that annihilates one’s capacity for critical or deep thinking. Next to the Feelies and orgies, the imaginary drug soma is the exemplary distraction in Huxley’s novel. [209] Take, for example, the difference between the two scenes that discuss Lenina’s reliance on soma: “When the Warden started booming,

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[206] The majority of which are intellectual pastimes that he associates with the cultivated, elite individual.
[207] Indeed, in “Pleasures” Huxley reasons that even Shakespeare’s plays demanded attention from the lower-class groundlings (355).
[208] Huxley’s understanding of bad art is equally bound up with the psychological judgement that modern distraction leads to intellectual degradation. Huxley’s writing is underlined by the view that the proliferation of mass culture will distract from addressing (what he sees as the pressing concern of) population control - a situation which, Huxley argues, will lead to a drop in the average IQ (*BNWR* 31). As we will see below, he not only sets critical reflection as the proper objective of art, but also designates it as the proper objective of the individual.
[209] Huxley deliberately created an imaginary psychotic drug as a synecdoche for this psychological drift: “The creatures finally decanted were almost subhuman; but they were capable of performing unskilled work and, when properly conditioned, detensioned by free and frequent access to the opposite sex, constantly distracted by gratuitous entertainment and reinforced in their good behaviour patterns by daily doses of soma, could be counted on to give no trouble to their superiors.” (*BNWR* 35).

she had inconspicuously swallowed half a gramme of soma, with the result that she could now sit, serenely not listening, thinking of nothing at all, but with her large blue eyes fixed on the Warden's face in an expression of rapt attention[,]" and "Lenina was still sobbing. 'Too awful,' she kept repeating, and all Bernard's consolations were in vain. 'Too awful! That blood!' She shuddered. 'Oh, I wish I had my *soma*.'" (*BNW* 118, 134). The disjuncture between these two examples shows that soma distracts in the sense that its pleasure is hostile to critical thinking. In the first scene, Huxley characterises Lenina's intoxication as a state of false pleasure and intellectual absence. Although the sensuous phenomena encase her (i.e. the loud sounds of the Warden), Lenina is not engaging with her surroundings. Like the Feelies' audience, her "rapt attention" is mere appearance, a cover for the fact that she is "thinking nothing at all". For Huxley, soma's pleasure represents a very real mental annihilation in which the deceptive appearance of society obscures its true, repressive state.[210] In the second scene, Lenina is confronted with that reality. However, even though she is no longer under the influence of soma, she resists facing the horror of the regime that she has been programmed to love, preferring to maintain the illusion.

Crucially, Huxley abhors distraction not only as a cultural problem, but as a driver of the individual's "deindividualisation" in totalitarian regimes. Huxley was consistently wedded to the primacy of the individual, the figure he designates as the primary agent of democracy, freedom, rationality and intelligence in his non-fictional essays (but more on this later).[211] He sees the collective – and attempts to understand self-governing individuals in society as part of a unified collective – as the very opposite of this individualism. He interprets the collective as a tool of dictatorships, mass culture and so-called 'imbecility'. In *Brave New World Revisited*, Huxley's main thesis is that society is driving towards the "deindividualised individual", a process in which the individual becomes forever dissolved in the collective of modern, mass society: "Any culture which, in the interests of

[210] In *Brave New World Revisited,* Huxley elaborates upon how he created soma as an allegory for his fears of the various ways that a psychological distraction (manipulation) of the masses could actually take place in the totalitarian regimes of the future (46).

[211] Crucially, Huxley presents a very specific and limited view of democracy. Huxley had a complicated relationship with democracy. Like many liberals, Huxley had misgivings about democracy precisely because he felt that equality could connive against difference. For more about his criticisms of democracy, see Alessandro Maurini's *Aldous Huxley The Political Thought of a Man of Letters* [2017] (15-19).

efficiency or in the name of some political or religious dogma, seeks to standardize the human individual, commits an outrage against man's biological nature." (16, 48). This anxiety underlines the novel's Bokanovsky's Process in which ninety-six twins (that are derived from a single foetus) are artificially grown in jars. The genetically superior elite exploit these mass-produced humans as a lower-class, unskilled workforce. Huxley evokes this anxiety in John's nightmares about these twins: "He woke once more to external reality, looked round him, knew what he saw - knew it, with a sinking sense of horror and disgust, for the recurrent delirium of his days and nights, the nightmare of swarming indistinguishable sameness. Twins, twins." (*BNW* 247). Huxley's rejection of standardisation can be read in the notion of the "indistinguishable sameness", which suggests that the identical trope of twins is taken to its extreme conclusion until a whole class of industrially produced people are reduced to the same person with the same face. This physical sameness reinforces the author's definition of the individual primarily in biological terms. The World Controller's celebration of the Bokanovsky Process as "[the] principle of mass production at last applied to biology" undermines and betrays man's individual biological constitution just as it reduces culture into the mass-produced products of the machine (*BNW* 7 and *BNWR* 105).[212] Huxley maintains that man's deinvidualisation – and the destruction of independent thought - turns him into an automaton who cannot see his oppression *and* successfully speak truth to power. Even though John perceives the cruel, "external reality" that Lenina rebuffs, his awareness marks him out as an exception who must be quashed; indeed, madness engulfs him and he commits suicide at the book's close.[213]

We can see why Huxley's novel resonated with Adorno. One of the main theses in "Aldous Huxley and Utopia" is that *Brave New World* depicts (and suggests a way out of) the debasement of pleasure in capitalism. As Adorno argues: "Huxley has recognised the contradiction that in a society where sexual taboos have lost their intrinsic force […] pleasure itself degenerates to the misery of 'fun' and to an occasion for the narcissistic satisfaction of having 'had' this or that person." (*Prisms*

[212] "In order to fit into these organisations, individuals have had to deindividualise themselves, have had to deny their native diversity and conform to a standard pattern, have had to do their best to become automata." (Huxley, *BNWR* 105).
[213] "Through an archway on the further side of the room they could see the bottom of the staircase that led up to the higher floors. Just under the crown of the arch dangled a pair of feet. 'Mr. Savage!'." (Huxley, *BNW* 306).

102). This passage refers to Lenina, the character who Adorno suggests is used by Huxley to represent the debasement of sexuality and pleasure (270). And it is the *debasement* of pleasure, both sexual and general, that captures Adorno's attention. Whether the female characters' shopping habits, the artificial reproduction of the twins, or the debasement of sexuality, the novel's various examples of degenerate pleasure resonated with Adorno as a thinker who had also already posed the modern situation of pleasure as a fundamental and pressing problem: "The German neopagans and administrators of war fever want to reinstate pleasure. But since, under the work-pressure of the millennium now ending, pleasure has learned to hate itself, in its totalitarian emancipation it remains mean and mutilated through self-contempt." (Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic* 24). The image of "mutilated" pleasure indicates that Adorno, too, does not dismiss the notion of pleasure wholesale but, like Huxley, sees *genuine* pleasure as a relic of the past that has now been corrupted and inverted into its polar opposite. This disjuncture can be fully understood in its specifically Adornian formulation by contextualising it within his lifelong project of developing a negatively dialectical way of opposing the conflation of the concept and the object.[214] My previous discussion of Adorno's notion of reification in "Chapter 1" – i.e. where capitalism obscures the difference (i.e. negative identity) between the object and the concept - can be used to bear upon Adorno's thoughts on pleasure and his turn to *Brave New World*. Adorno's interpretation of Huxley's novel sees a difference between the object of pleasure (as it actually is in modern society: degenerated) and the ideal concept of pleasure (pleasure as it *ought* to be) (*ND* 8).

This reading of false pleasure in *Brave New World* emerges from Adorno's perspective that the problematic situation of modern pleasure is bound up with the problematic situation of modern culture. Adorno's comment that the "struggle against mass culture can consist only in pointing out its connection with the persistence of social injustice" shows that he agrees with Huxley's view that culture was being used as an apparatus of political control in the twentieth century (*Prisms* 108).[215]

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[214] Whilst *Negative Dialectics* [1966] was the culmination of Adorno's thought on the discrepancy between what is genuine and what is false, he was developing this project of a negatively dialectical critique of the disjuncture between the object and the concept from his very early theory.

[215] Adorno's frequent references to "mass culture", the "mass produced consumption goods" and "mass civilisation" evoke his view that capitalism has imprinted a "mass" character onto society and its people (*Prisms* 256-58).

Adorno's interpretation is informed by his earlier work on the "culture industry" ["*Kulturindustrie*"], the idea that capitalism had injected its character – for example, the character of machine-operated work– into modern culture in order to debase it and turn it into a weapon that pushes false pleasures and needs onto the masses (Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic* 128 and *Dialektik* 152).[216] As Adorno and Horkheimer declare:

> The culture industry does not sublimate: it suppresses. By constantly exhibiting the object of desire, the breasts beneath the sweater, the naked torso of the sporting hero, it merely goads the unsublimated anticipation of pleasure, which through the habit of denial has long since been mutilated as masochism. There is no erotic situation in which innuendo and incitement are not accompanied by the clear notification that things will never go so far. (*Dialectic* 111).[217]

Although Adorno was ultimately a critic of Huxley's reading of sexual pleasure (as we will see later), this passage indicates why Adorno was nevertheless drawn to Huxley's sexually charged diagnosis of how modern culture had become largely debased by the character of mass production. Adorno was sympathetic to Huxley's view that capitalism invokes pornographic culture to debase true pleasure, substituting in its place a teasing culture that is, in reality, violent because it forever extends the promise of pleasure to the average individual without ever giving satisfaction, offering at best a simulacrum of genuine pleasure. Adorno certainly brought this interpretation to the novel: "For it, the model's commercial smile becomes what it is, the contorted grin of the victim." (*Prisms* 97). Adorno's invocation of this unerotically erotic image of the woman in modern advertisements not only draws upon the conceit of the false smile from his own culture industry essays, but indicates that he was picking up on the fact that this trope also runs throughout Huxley's novel. For example, take when Lenina asks Bernard: "'[Why don't you] take soma when you have these dreadful ideas of yours. You'd forget all about them. And instead of feeling miserable, you'd be jolly. So jolly,' she

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[216] As Adorno's essay "On Popular Music" [1941] attests, his argument that the organised boredom of machine-operated work had seeped into the character of leisure-time and culture resembles Huxley's position in 'Pleasures' (*Essays* 73).

[217] See also Adorno and Horkheimer's statement that: "What seems to matter in such events, more than pleasure itself, is the busy pursuit of pleasure, its organisation [.]" (*Dialectic* 69).

repeated and smiled, for all the puzzled anxiety in her eyes, with what was meant to be an inviting and voluptuous cajolery." (Huxley, *BNW* 106-07). Adorno picks up on the disjuncture between the erotic intention of Lenina's smile ("what was meant to be") and the unerotic eyes that disrupt the "voluptuous" sex that she is selling. And like Adorno's model, Lenina's false smile is betrayed by the truth in her eyes: that the modern products of mass production (in this case, soma and Lenina's sexuality) are exploited to fashion a mask of false happiness that obscures the false consciousness inflicted upon the majority in modern, capitalist society.

Adorno interprets Lenina's pains to put on a show as an example of false consciousness. Adorno's conception of distraction ["*Ablenkung*"] is strikingly similar to Huxley's earlier conception: "Amusement always means putting things out of mind, forgetting suffering, even when it is on display. […] The liberation which amusement promises is from thinking as negation." (Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialektik* 67 and *Dialectic* 33). In this specific formulation of false consciousness, Adorno presents the idea that humans cannot perceive the discrepancy between the object of pleasure given by society, the unpleasure it actually provides, and the non-identity between this false pleasure and the ideal concept of genuine pleasure. Adorno's formulation reveals his anxiety that the capitalist system manipulates entertainment as an instrument to distract the average citizen from critical thinking – for example, recognising the abuses of their government. To illustrate this false consciousness, Adorno gives the example of *Brave New World*'s "death conditioning" which "purges children of the horror of death" (*Prisms* 99). In the novel, death conditioning is defined as a process in which: "Every tot spends two mornings a week in a Hospital for the Dying. All the best toys are kept there, and they get chocolate cream on death days. They learn to take dying as a matter of course." (Huxley, *BNW* 193). But, more specifically, Adorno's analysis applies to the scene where John finds his mother Linda dying from soma addiction in hospital. The mass-produced twins gather and focus on the "shocking scene" until the nurse - who oversees the conditioning of the children's brains and acts as the synecdoche for the regime - prevents this resistance from fully realising itself: "No, the risk was too great; the whole Group might be put back six or seven months in its conditioning. She hurried back towards her menaced charges. 'Now, who wants a chocolate éclair?' she asked in a loud, cheerful tone. 'Me!' yelled the entire Bokanovsky Group in chorus. Bed 20 was completely

forgotten." (244). Just as Lenina uses soma to deny the truth of her regime's violence, Adorno picks up on how the gluttony of the "candy" is a metaphor for the false pleasure that prevents the characters from critically interrogating the totalitarian regime (*Prisms* 99).[218]

Adorno's reading of death conditioning as an allegory for capitalism's false consciousness demonstrates that he shared Huxley's fear that modern society would impact the individual and its abilities to think and to experience genuine pleasure. Adorno notices that Huxley uses the twins to divulge his own anxiety about "desubjectivisation" (*Prisms* 99). As Adorno puts it, "children of society in the literal sense, men no longer exist in dialectical opposition to society but rather are identical with it in their substance." (99). Adorno interprets the twins' diminutive stature as an indication of a stunted mind, arguing that capitalism imprints itself on the mind so that the individual will reproduce its ideology and become one with capitalism's whole social order. In step with Adorno's general sense of the opposition of the universal and particular, he presents what this abstract universalism may entail – that if a bad society stands for 'the universal', anything that is good and not identical with that bad society (i.e. the critical individual) is cancelled out. Yet Adorno's reading of the twins, that "[false consciousness] is indeed escape, but not, as it claims, escape from bad reality but from the last thought of resisting that reality", also presents a glimmer of hope: that thought itself is resistance (99). We see this resistance in the novel. When John attacks a clone for laughing at his mother, the audacious twin actually reveals himself to be an individual whose curiosity resists his conditioning (Huxley, *BNW* 239-40). Of course, Adorno is aware that his appeal to the individual's resistant thought may no longer be possible. The "too inquisitive" twin is "led away" to join the other clones, becoming one with the masses once again (240). Adorno's reading is caught in a bind in which appealing to the individual is problematic yet highly seductive. Adorno questions whether the uncritical mass could once again become individuals who are aware of the non-identity between their

[218] "The ultimate effect of conditioning, which is in fact adjustment come into its own, is a degree of introjection and integration of social pressure and coercion far beyond that of the Protestant ethic; men resign themselves to loving what they have to do, without even being aware that they are resigned. Thus, their happiness is firmly established subjectively and order is maintained." (Adorno, *Prisms* 99). Critically, Adorno picks up on the systemic issue that this false consciousness is a universal affliction. He notes how it is not just the biologically inferior twins who are victims of this uncritical stance, but also the elite such as Mond or the nurse who are caught up in reproducing the system that tricks them into thinking that they are consensually working for it.

dystopic world and what could be otherwise - an ideal world where critical culture would draw attention to this very non-identity, provoking one to overthrow the capitalist system and once again experience *genuine* pleasure.[219] To understand Adorno's initial attraction to Huxley's position, we will now turn to those moments where Adorno genuinely considers Huxley's construction of the critical individual to be a potentially effective response to capitalism's mutilation of pleasure.

**2. Huxley's and Adorno's Appeals to Individualism**

In *Brave New World Revisited*, Huxley reveals that he is plagued by and yet invested in the question of whether the modern phenomenon of deindividualisation can ever be reversed. As Huxley states:

> Given Freud, given Behaviourism, given the mass producer's chronically desperate need for mass consumption, [deindividualisation] is only to be expected. But what, we may ask, is the sort of thing that is to be expected in the future? […] Can a campaign in favour of rationality be successful in the teeth of another and even more vigorous campaign in favour of irrationality? (*BNWR* 32).

The final question here discloses a certain nervousness about the future, as evident in Huxley's resigned thought that perhaps rationality is a lost cause. This shift is directly related to Huxley's view that society has moved towards collectivisation to the detriment of the individual, a tension which he injects into a disagreement between Bernard and Lenina: "'When the individual feels, the community reels,' Lenina pronounced. [Bernard:] 'Well, why shouldn't it reel a bit?'" (*BNW* 109). It is telling that Huxley has characterised his fictional totalitarian regime as one in which the individual and their thoughts are treated as a threat to the government, a government which conditions its believers to pressure the unbelievers to fall back in line. Bernard's pointed disagreement with Lenina essentially rehearses Huxley's view that the individual is the agent of rational thinking and, as we will soon see,

[219] See Adorno's comment in *Minima Moralia* on the critical potential of the average person becoming aware of the "false pleasure" offered to them by capitalism: "Only when sated with false pleasure, disgusted with the goods offered, dimly aware of the inadequacy of happiness even when it is that - to say nothing of cases where it is bought by abandoning allegedly morbid resistance to its positive surrogate - can men gain an idea of what experience might be." (38).

freedom and democracy. Huxley characterises certain extreme emotions as the irrational counterparts to rational thinking, arguing that those who are overly emotional or have low IQs are easily manipulated by advertisers and, potentially, despots (*BNWR* 19).[220] For Huxley, if Lenina's position wins out over Bernard's position (which it certainly seems to do at the end of the novel when Bernard is banished), the game is over. Lenina's promotion of a totalising, unthinking collectivisation represents a slippery slope (or, as Huxley puts it, a "road to the Brave New World") in which the growing masses' increasing irrationality is exploited by a small elite that controls the majority through totalitarian governance (35). And yet, if we re-examine Huxley's question of whether rationality can win out, it can be read as more than just an expression of resignation, but also as a call to arms for the future. Despite these challenges, Huxley cannot let go of his commitment to the primacy of the individual over the collective. Indeed, Bernard's act of questioning Lenina's sloganeering indicates that Huxley genuinely wanted to challenge and find a solution to society's replacement of the individual (and its rationality) with the collective (and, in his eyes, its irrationality).

To comprehend Huxley's response to deindividualisation, we should examine two major so-called "impersonal forces" that, he argues, negate the individual in favour of the collective. The first is the problem of overpopulation. His fictional regime uses eugenics in the form of birth control as a method of control. As another instance of conditioning, Lenina happily takes contraceptive pills from a "Malthusian belt" she wears every day (Huxley, *BNW* 59).[221] Her conformity is emphasised when she displays her horror at the sight of natural child-rearing in Malpais: "The spectacle of two young women giving breast to their babies made her blush and turn away her face. She had never seen anything so indecent in her life." (129). Her horror demonstrates that 'natural' reproduction has become alienated from its original meaning, replaced by technological, machine-controlled reproductive processes such as decanting babies in jars (8). We might expect that this is another example of modern society's production of the identical masses that Huxley would condemn. But

[220] Of course, the term "feels" here emphasises that Huxley does not completely discount emotions from his vision of humanity, but he does reject overly extreme emotions that distract the individual from rational thinking.

[221] "And round her waist she wore a silver-mounted green morocco-surrogate cartridge belt, bulging (for Lenina was not a freemartin) with the regulation supply of contraceptives." (Huxley, *BNW* 59).

despite Huxley's admission that he constructed his negative utopia to discuss the potential destruction of the individual with new technologies, his so-called "fantasy eugenics" is the one element of his fictional totalitarian regime that he does not necessarily condemn (*BNWR* 39). After discussing the role of his fictional birth control, he contrasts it against the absence of an equivalent contraceptive in real life: "In this second half of the twentieth century we do nothing systematic about our breeding; but in our random and unregulated way we are not only overpopulating our planet, we are also, it would seem, making sure that these greater numbers shall be of biologically poorer quality." (37). As the title of this section of his essay indicates – "Quantity, Quality, Morality" - Huxley suggests that population growth threatens individual rationality, arguing that a growing *quantity* of people with mental and physical disabilities will negatively affect the *quality* of the average IQ (31). Huxley reasons that, despite the moral issues surrounding eugenics in regard to personal freedom from state interference, the means of state-sanctioned population control justify the ends (an anti-totalitarian society that respects the individual) more than good intentions that give worse results (the inability of the state to help the masses, the breakdown of society, a resulting totalitarian government, and the resulting destruction of the individual) (45).[222]

Huxley argues that the deindividualising effect of overpopulation is directly connected to a second impersonal force – the centralisation of power. As Huxley elaborates:

> The dehumanising effects of over-organization are reinforced by the dehumanising effects of over-population. Industry, as it expands, draws an ever greater proportion of humanity's increasing numbers into large cities. But life in large cities is not conducive to mental health (the highest incidence of schizophrenia, we are told, occurs among the swarming inhabitants of industrial slums); nor does it foster the kind of responsible freedom within small self-governing groups, which is the first condition of a genuine democracy. City life is anonymous and, as it were, abstract. People are related to one another, not as total personalities, but as the embodiments of economic functions or, when they are not at work, as irresponsible seekers of

[222] Of course, Huxley's view that procreation should not be a matter of individual choice is arguably totalitarian in its own right.

> entertainment. Subjected to this kind of life, individuals tend to feel lonely and insignificant. Their existence ceases to have any point or meaning. (*BNWR* 50).

Huxley's attitude towards birth control is an exception to his opposition towards governments that exert "total control" on their citizens (48). Against organisation in its extremes of either anarchy or total domination, Huxley pursues a balance in the form of communities made up of "freely cooperating individuals", thereby conceiving autonomous individuals as society's underlying unit (55). Huxley poses those with high intelligence as the decision-makers who will realise a more utopian, decentralised societal structure.[223] In contrast, he argues that his own society, with its growing population, is decreasing the average individual's IQ and leading to an easily manipulated, mass society. It is for this reason that Huxley resists the notion that there is a single, unified society. He perceives that modern society encourages the concentration of power in too few hands, which takes the ability to resist away from the individual:

> It is in the social sphere, in the realm of politics and economics, that the Will to Order becomes really dangerous. Here the theoretical reduction of unmanageable multiplicity to comprehensible unity becomes the practical reduction of human diversity to subhuman uniformity, of freedom to servitude. In politics the equivalent of a fully developed scientific theory or philosophical system is a totalitarian dictatorship. (53).

Huxley argues that the unequal distribution of resources establishes a top-down structure that denies individuals economic freedom and self-determination. He reasons that the resulting unequal power relations enable bad actors to exploit this centralised position in order to control the majority of citizens, denying a more democratic (read: decentralised) societal structure that recognises the intellectual inputs of different individuals in different places.

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[223] Strangely, Huxley's discussion of the reduction of human relations into economic relations comes quite close to Adorno's position, which takes from the Marxist theory of commodity fetishism. As we have discussed before, commodity fetishism describes the process in which society replaces the relation between humans with one between humans and commodities until humans love and value things rather than people. For instance, the practical approach of re-organising society by reversing urbanisation and returning to largely countryside communities aims to avoid the city structures that divorce people from one another, reducing them to one standardised mass. However, it must be stressed that Huxley is not a Marxist and therefore does not hold the exact same opinion as Adorno. For instance, Huxley is more concerned with the alienation of the individual than the alienation of people from one another.

Huxley argues that the impersonal forces driving deindividualisation can be nevertheless resisted by appealing to the individual.[224] Just as Huxley was worried about the impossibility of rationality, he hedges his bets that its individualistic impulse is still a point of resistance: "But some of us still believe that, without freedom, human beings cannot become fully human and that freedom is therefore supremely valuable. Perhaps the forces that now menace freedom are too strong to be resisted for very long. It is still our duty to do whatever we can to resist them." (*BNWR* 98). This passage exposes the contradiction that Huxley is relying on the very individuality that he also considers to be in terminal decline:

> The members of the highest caste will have to be able to think new thoughts in response to new situations; consequently their training will be much less rigid than the training imposed upon those whose business is not to reason why, but merely to do and die with the minimum of fuss. These upper-caste individuals will be members, still, of a wild species -- the trainers and guardians, themselves only slightly conditioned, of a breed of completely domesticated animals. Their wildness will make it possible for them to become heretical and rebellious. When this happens, they will have to be either liquidated, or brainwashed back into orthodoxy, or (as in *Brave New World*) exiled to some island, where they can give no further trouble, except of course to one another. But universal infant conditioning and the other techniques of manipulation and control are still a few generations away in the future. (110).

In the scene Huxley is referring to here (i.e. when Bernard is forced to an island as a punishment for refusing to submit to the values of the regime), we see a portrait of Huxley's resisting individual. As Mond reflects:

> 'One would think he was going to have his throat cut,' said the Controller, as the door closed. 'Whereas, if he had the smallest sense, he'd understand that his punishment is really a reward. He's being sent to an island. That's to say, he's being sent to a place where he'll meet the most interesting set of men and women to be found anywhere in the world. All the people who, for

[224] As Huxley states: "All the available evidence points to the conclusion that in the life of individuals and societies heredity is no less significant than culture." (*BNWR* 36).

> one reason or another, have got too self-consciously individual to fit into community-life. All the people who aren't satisfied with orthodoxy, who've got independent ideas of their own.' (*BNW* 267-68).

At first glance, this ending seems incredibly pessimistic. Mond confirms Huxley's fear that the regime will quash the individual's so called "wildness" or rebelliousness by administering a punishment posing as pleasure.[225] However, Huxley suggests that there is hope when people like Bernard can exist. Huxley's biological presentation of the upper caste's intellectual superiority suggests that Bernard represents this ideal, rational individual. Mond's description of the island's people presents the habitants as an elite whose "too self-consciously individual" quality offers a residual point of "wildness", which suggests that the islanders still have the unique ability to produce "new thoughts". The isolated island stands as a metaphor for the community of individuals who can negate the regime's promise of unanimity; not only do the islanders' thoughts stand outside of the repressive government's logic, but, by being separated from the lower-class, unthinking masses, the book implies that these individuals are shielded from a decline in IQ.[226] Despite the clear elitism of such hope, Huxley consoles himself with the fact that the conditioning techniques in his novel are not yet possible in real life and that individualism is therefore not yet a lost cause (*BNWR* 45).

To resurrect this virtuous individualism, he suggests a legislative appeal to the individual's rationality once more in the face of irrationality. Amongst various legislative solutions in his essay, the most worked-out one is the establishment of what Huxley terms an "education for freedom":

> Such an education for freedom should be, as I have said, an education first of all in facts and in values -- the fact of individual diversity and genetic uniqueness and the values of freedom, tolerance and mutual charity which are the ethical corollaries of these facts. But unfortunately correct knowledge and sound principles are not enough. An unexciting truth may be eclipsed by a thrilling falsehood. A skilful appeal to passion is often too strong for the best of good

[225] See, for example, Mond's incredulity at Bernard's supposed ungratefulness for not being killed, a response which glosses over the violence of his banishment (Huxley, *BNW* 267-68).
[226] However, Huxley's view that society should be made up of different *communities* of individuals exposes the inadequacy of his own bald contrasts between the individual and the community.

> resolutions. The effects of false and pernicious propaganda cannot be neutralised except by a thorough training in the art of analysing its techniques and seeing through its sophistries. (*BNWR* 92).

Huxley is once again conceding to the social constitution of the individualism he favours. The first aim of this "education for freedom" is to intervene in the psychological conditioning of children in the education system. He suggests instead to train the upcoming generation to be critical of consensus, to value biological and intellectual difference over a philosophy that promotes community cohesion. Huxley is essentially defining an education for freedom as an education that replicates his own values: a necessary prevention of the issues that arise from a society that promotes deindividualisation. He holds that the "children of society" should pursue a more decentralised, diverse way of running the world. This point leads to Huxley's second point of qualifying the shape of this education, arguing that the individual needs to use its residual thinking skills to perform an analysis of its situation in modern society. Huxley argues that the individual can resist falling victim to distraction by becoming *aware* of their state of distraction and deindividualisation. He sets one of the crucial aims of this education as training children to learn the skill of distinguishing the difference between what is false and what is true – for example, to see where the regime's so-called pleasurable activities are, in reality, violent punishments. He sees the elite's ability to create "new thoughts" as a way for the individual's rationality to assert itself against the regime's false claim to universality and truth.[227] He wants the individual to see its rationality as a breach that one can draw upon to perceive the true state of society, resist this change, and move instead towards a more decentralised (and, in his mind, therefore more democratic) society.

If we turn to Adorno, we can see that he is somewhat attracted to Huxley's view of the individual as an intrinsic good. In the opening of his essay on Huxley, Adorno's preoccupation with the individual's incapacity to critique America's culture industry reveals his sympathy for the way that Huxley poses the problem of deindividualisation. As Adorno outlines:

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[227] Again, given Huxley's qualms about centralisation, his notion of an intellectual elite is a strange centralisation of intelligence within a community.

> The refractory individual who does not capitulate and completely toe the line is abandoned to the shocks which the world of things, concentrated into gigantic blocks, administers to whatever does not make itself into a thing. Impotent in the machinery of the universally developed commodity relation, which has become the supreme standard, the intellectual reacts to the shock with panic. (*Prisms* 97).

This passage is arguably an autobiographical reflection; the "refractory individual" that Adorno has in mind is the (Jewish) academic émigré in twentieth-century America. Adorno suggests that even in a sanctuary away from European fascism, the American culture industry subjects this academic outsider to the same false consciousness that it inflicts on the American citizen. He argues that American society violently subordinates the otherwise 'alien' individual by stamping it with the commodity character so that the individual sacrifices its ability to critique its new home and, consequently, its ability to perceive the unpleasures of American society. Adorno emphasises the irony that the intellectual is forced to abandon the critical self in an act of self-preservation. It is at this moment of the essay that Adorno brings in *Brave New World*, motivated by its message that collectivisation – or this drive to fit into society - is to blame for the individual's dissolution. As Adorno elaborates: "'Community, Identity, and Stability' replaces the motto of the French Revolution. Community defines a collectivity in which each individual is unconditionally subordinated to the functioning of the whole (the question of the point of this whole is no longer permitted or even possible in the New World)." (Huxley, *BNW* 1; Adorno*, Prisms* 98). Unpacking the famous slogan that opens the novel, Adorno is drawn to the author's presentation of "community" as a totalitarian organisation of society and, by extension, joins Huxley in a nostalgic lament for the individual.

Adorno identifies Huxley's novel as having a certain critical quality that can represent and attempt to negate the intellectual émigré's false-consciousness and deindividualisation:

> Huxley's *Brave New World* is a manifestation of this panic, or rather, its rationalisation. The novel, a fantasy of the future with a rudimentary plot, endeavours to comprehend the shocks through the principle of the disenchanted world, to heighten this principle to absurdity, and to derive the idea of human dignity from the comprehension of inhumanity. The point of

> departure seems to be the perception of the universal similarity of everything mass-produced, things as well as human beings. (*Prisms* 97).

Adorno suggests that *Brave New World* escapes the incapacity of the intellectual émigré and can expose the truth of American society. His description of the text as a "manifestation" touches upon Adorno's argument elsewhere, that the novel is the first successful depiction of the individual's complete absorption into the collective: "And this truly produces a ghastly parody: the identity between the objectively prevailing state, or the conditions objectively forced on people, and their own consciousness, something outlined for the first time by Aldous Huxley in *Brave New World* [.]" (*Philosophical Elements* 68). By arguing that Huxley's text is a privileged space for representing the conflicting demands of individual consciousness and the unthinking mass (and the fact that it can even "parody" the individual's inability to contradict the regime), Adorno suggests that the text can rip the veil off the unpleasure and deinvidiualisation perpetuated in the culture industry. The language of understanding in his essay on Huxley (the novel is a means "to comprehend the shocks" ["*die Schocks* […] *zu begreifen*]; it is a door to "perception" ["*Wahrnehmung*"]) reinforces Adorno's view that the response to collectivisation will need to have an intellectual basis (*Prismen* 117). Indeed, his idea that the novel derives "the idea of human dignity from the comprehension of inhumanity" indicates that Adorno desires to somehow resurrect the individual and, crucially, individual consciousness in the face of their negation.

Adorno locates *Brave New World*'s critical quality in its characters: namely, Bernard Marx, Mustapha Mond and Lenina. For example, Adorno argues that:

> [Social criticism's] actual advocate in the novel is Bernard Marx, an Alpha-Plus who rebels against his own conditioning, a sceptically compassionate caricature of a Jew. Huxley is well aware that Jews are persecuted because they are not completely assimilated and that precisely for this reason their consciousness occasionally reaches beyond the social system. He does not question the authenticity of Bernard's critical insight. But the insight itself is attributed to a sort of organic inferiority, the inevitable inferiority complex. (*Prisms* 106).

Adorno is marking out a tension, arguing that even Huxley himself is not taking the individualism of his own character far enough. Bernard's characterisation as a stunted Alpha Plus is an instance of Huxley's antisemitic depiction of the Jewish body. Despite this, Adorno judges that Huxley's depiction of Bernard is a "sceptically compassionate caricature" (105).[228] Adorno grasps onto the character's Jewishness - indicated, presumably, by the surname Marx – and reads Bernard through his own experience as an intellectual émigré. Rather than stunting Bernard's critical insight, Adorno suggests that Bernard's otherness allows him to question the status quo from within. Take the following comment from Huxley's novel: "'Well, why shouldn't it reel a bit?'" (*BNW* 109). Adorno's interpretation of Bernard considers Huxley's view that the individual must be rescued from the collective. However, he offers this approach in a very specific form: by appealing to the novel's resistant characters who are marked as *other* and against the collective.

Adorno's approach to Huxley's characters is underlined by his romanticisation of the Ibsenite figure of the "enemy of the people". As Adorno argues in his essay on Huxley:

> Ever since Ibsen's invention of Gregers Werle and Stockmann, actually since Hegel's philosophy of history, bourgeois cultural politics, claiming to survey and speak for the whole, has sought to unmask anyone who seeks to change things as both the genuine child and the perverse product of the whole which he opposes, and has insisted that the truth is always on the side of the whole, be it against him or present in him. (*Prisms* 106).

Adorno's reference to "Werle and Stockmann" are allusions to the resisting, critical protagonists of Henrik Ibsen's plays *The Wild Duck* [*Vildanden*] and *An Enemy of the People* [*En folkefiende*]. Adorno often argued that Ibsen's bourgeois characters could be read as offering the possibility that the individual could rebel against the collective.[229] In this case, Adorno examines the regime's attitude to Bernard through the concept of "*ein Volksfeind*" (i.e. "the People's enemy", or "the enemy of the

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[228] Although Adorno seems to be picking up on Huxley's hostility to Jewish individuals here, his claim that Huxley offers a "sceptically compassionate caricature" is more generally problematised by Huxley's antisemitic comments in his non-fiction writings. For more information, see Claudia Rosenhan's article "Aldous Huxley and Anti-Semitism" [2003] (217-37).

[229] See, for example, Adorno's interpretations of Gregers Werle in *Problems of Moral Philosophy* and Dr Stockmann in *Minima Moralia* (*Problems* 162 and *MM* 91).

people").[230] On one level, Adorno conceives the "enemy of the people" as a position that attempts to expose society's untruth – or, what Gregers calls society's "life-lie" ["*livsløgnen*"] (Ibsen, *The Oxford* 226 and *Vildanden* 92). In both plays, Gregers Werle and Dr Stockmann are defined by their individualism, as people who oppose an untrue consensus, no matter the consequences. Gregers reveals what he terms the "life-lie" of two families: that a young girl, Hedvig, is actually the biological daughter of his own father Old Gregers, not Old Ekdal, a revelation which leads to Hedvig's suicide. Stockmann protests the contamination of his town's local spa despite opposition from the rest of the town, culminating in the famous scene that is described by Adorno as "the solid majority shouting down the enemy of the people [.]" (*MM* 92). Adorno reads Huxley's complacent characters as representatives of this "solid majority". He appropriates Ibsen's understanding of the People ["*das Volk*"] - a group who fiercely maintained the status quo that was not even in their interest - to understand the repressive consensus of the community in *Brave New World*.

By reading Huxley's critical characters as prime examples of "enemies of the people", Adorno shows how he, too, considers that the negation of the thinking individual might be addressed by appealing to that very bourgeois individual. Take when Adorno states: "The source of untruth is the separation of subjective and objective, which has been reified to a rigid alternative. Mustapha Mond, the *raisonneur* and devil's advocate of the book, who embodies the most articulate self-consciousness of *Brave New World*, formulates the alternative." (*Prisms* 110). Here, Adorno characterises the Controller as the character who occupies the very critical role of Dr Stockmann in the sense that both observe the gaps that contradict society's overriding, false narratives. As Adorno comments: "To the Savage's protest that man is degraded by total civilisation [Mond] replies, 'Degrade him from what position? As a happy, hard-working, goods-consuming citizen he's perfect.

[230] The notion of "*ein Volksfeind*" relates to the term *Volk* (i.e. the People), a multifaceted term with many meanings that has had a long, loaded history since the early nineteenth century (see Brian Vick's article "The Origins of the German Volk: Cultural Purity and National Identity in Nineteenth-Century Germany" [2003] [241-56]). Adorno was probably drawn to Ibsen's resistance against becoming subsumed into the *Volk*. However, whilst Ibsen's presentation of "*en folkefiende*" was resisting against the concept of "*das Volk*" that was invoked in Prussian politics in the 1870s (see Norman Rhodes' comments in *Ibsen and the Greeks* [1995] [149]), Adorno critiqued the specific iteration of the populist *völkisch* identity that was ascribed to the Aryan race in Nazi Germany.

Of course, if you choose some other standard than ours, then perhaps you might say he was degraded. But you've got to stick to one set of postulates.'" (Adorno, *Prisms* 110; Huxley, *BNW* 278). Of course, this appeal to Mond is odd - even Adorno acknowledges that the World Controller ultimately submits to the logic of the repressive system he dictates.[231] However, the fact that Mond can critically reflect upon his society gives Adorno hope that all is not lost. Mond reveals that the very values of his society are not objective. After Bernard is banished to the island, Mond acknowledges the existence of individuals who feel that their concept of a good society has not matched up with the object of the fascist regime, but "some other standard" (Huxley, *BNW* 278). Mond displays a residual "self-consciousness" that does not take his regime for granted, betraying that society can be set up in a different way if one challenges its "postulates". For Adorno, it is Mond's ability to perceive this difference between the two camps' values and subsequent organisation of society that represents the possibility of forging a genuine alternative to the negative utopia.

Adorno suggests that Huxley's critique of deindividualisation might also be used to resist the mutilation of pleasure. As Adorno would later express in *Negative Dialectics*, "The cognitive utopia ["*Die Utopie der Erkenntnis"*] would be to use concepts to unseal the non-conceptual with concepts, without making it their equal." (*ND* 10 and *Negative Dialektik* 19).[232] Adorno is arguing that, despite the fact that thinking (i.e. the deployment of concepts) to master what is outside and other to the individual (i.e. objects) results in the individual's negation, he maintains that thinking can be used to negate this very situation. First, Adorno is dismissing the idea that the object is identical with its concept, arguing that a Hegelian attempt to reconcile the conceptual with the non-conceptual feeds into the incorporation of the individual into a unified, flattened collective. However, he adds that one should draw upon the conceptual in order to make this discrepancy clear. He argues that by *thinking* about the difference between object and concept, one can escape the uncritical unification of different parts. Adorno asserts that a kind of "non-identity thinking" can be used to negate the problems that

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[231] See the following exchange between Mond and Bernard: "'Almost nobody. I'm one of the very few. It's prohibited, you see. But as I make the laws here, I can also break them. With impunity, Mr. Marx,' he added, turning to Bernard. 'Which I'm afraid you *can't* do.' Bernard sank into a yet more hopeless misery." (Huxley, *BNW* 258).

[232] In German, this sentence reads: "*Die Utopie der Erkenntnis wäre, das Begriffslose mit Begriffen aufzutun, ohne es ihnen gleichzumachen.*" (Adorno, *Negative Dialektik* 19).

arose from bourgeois individuality. Adorno reflects that despite the apparent impossibility of thinking after the war, he nevertheless chooses critical theory, or the act of critical thinking, as the only way out of the inability to think critically (*MM* 18). Adorno turns to Lenina to dispute Huxley's view that her loyalty to her society's culture bars her from critical thinking. Adorno focuses upon a moment in which Lenina gets angry at the Savage for dismissing a film from her culture: "'Why did he go out of his way to spoil things?' […] But Lenina's overzealous defensiveness betrays insecurity, the suspicion that her kind of happiness is distorted by contradictions, that it is not happiness even by its own definition." (Huxley, *BNW* 200; Adorno, *Prisms* 110). Adorno interprets Lenina's insecurity as a critical moment in which she, at the very least, thinks about John's idea that her society's culture may not be pleasurable at all. It is in her self-consciousness, her perception of this shortfall, that Adorno glimpses a "cognitive utopia". The notion of a "*Utopie der Etkenntnis*" reveals that Adorno locates pleasure in the very act of thinking. More specifically, Adorno finds pleasure in the character's ability to perceive the negative identity between the regime's false pleasure and the thought of what pleasure could be. For Adorno, this experience of pleasure in an otherwise unpleasurable world is a point of escape, the beginning of a journey from the negative utopia to a new societal structure where pleasure can proliferate. But, as we will now see, Adorno realised that this recuperation of pleasure could not be achieved through Huxley's individualism.

**3. Adorno's Problem with Huxley's Individualism**

Despite his initial attraction to Huxley's response to deindividualisation, there is a sudden turn in "Aldous Huxley and Utopia" where Adorno concludes that an appeal to individualisation is an inadequate response to the problem of false pleasure in capitalism. Adorno comments that those "completely collectivised and incessantly communicating might as well abandon all communication at once and acknowledge themselves to be the mute monads they have been surreptitiously since the beginnings of bourgeois society." (*Prisms* 101). Adorno sneaks in a critique of the bourgeois individual from the offset, arguing that despite the appearance of its autonomy as a "monad", the individual's critical function was still uncritical – or "mute" – *even* when it was at its prime. Adorno had already established the shaky foundations of the critical individual in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*:

> The human being's mastery of itself, on which the self is founded, practically always involves the annihilation of the subject in whose service that mastery is maintained, because the substance which is mastered, suppressed, and disintegrated by self-preservation is nothing other than the living entity, of which the achievements of self-preservation can only be defined as functions – in other words, self-preservation destroys the very thing which is to be preserved. (Adorno and Horkheimer 43).

As we discussed in the first section of this chapter, Adorno saw a contradiction in individual self-interest. He reasoned that the subject's mastery of the object encourages the individual to master its own nature *and* what is outside of itself. This mastery replicates a similar urge in capitalism which stamps itself on everything until it takes on a capitalist logic. Adorno argues that the actual individual ceases to exist because it gives birth to the society that led to its decline, moving from a subject to a dominated object. Furthermore, when the individual cancels anything *other* than itself, the individual subsumes its own particularity into the general. By concluding that the individual leads to the collective that Huxley hated so much, Adorno ultimately questions Huxley's nostalgia for a figure that was inadequate from its conception.[233]

Adorno follows up this turn by demystifying the special status that he had just given to the novel's critical characters. If we revisit Adorno's Ibsenite reading of Huxley's individual characters, he concedes that his elevation of them is flawed: "It is true that Gregers Werle destroys those he seeks to save, and no one is free from the vanity of Bernard Marx who, in raising himself above the general stupidity, thereby imagines himself untainted by it" (*Prisms* 106). Adorno concedes that even characters such as Gregers and Bernard fall into the trap of what he calls the bourgeois "detached,

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[233] The mechanics of this transition from subject to object of domination is as follows: "Socially, the absolute status granted to the individual marks the transition from the universal mediation of social relation - a mediation which, as exchange, always also requires curtailment of the particular interests realised through into direct domination, where power is seized by the strongest. Through this dissolution of all the mediating elements within the individual himself, by virtue of which he was, in spite of everything, also a part of a social subject, he regresses, impoverished and coarsened, to the state of a mere social object. As something abstractly realised, in Hegel's sense, the individual cancels himself out: the countless people who know nothing but their naked, prowling interest are those who capitulate the moment organization and terror overtake them." (Adorno, *MM* 150). See also Adorno's comment in *Prisms* that: "The very construction which simultaneously denounces the totalitarian world-state and glorifies retrospectively the individualism that brought it about becomes itself totalitarian" (113).

free, superior way", in which the individual conceives itself as being outside and unaffected by society (106).[234] In *The Wild Duck,* Gregers' commitment to the truth has the unintended consequence of provoking Hedvig to kill herself, rejected by the man she thought was her father. Similarly, although Huxley sets Bernard up as a character who resists no matter the consequences (see, for example, his many contrarian outbursts), Marx falls from grace when John the Savage and Helmholtz are nearly maimed by a "mob" (i.e. another representation of *das Volk*): "Hesitant on the fringes of the battle. 'They're done for,' said Bernard and, urged by a sudden impulse, ran forward to help them; then thought better of it and halted; then, ashamed, stepped forward again; then again thought better of it [.]" (Huxley, *BNW* 252-53).[235] By doing nothing to save his friends, Bernard betrays his radical ideas. Bernard's idealism demonstrates to Adorno that even Huxley's individual characters are not immune from thinking themselves untouched by society's faults.[236] As an advocate for an "immanent critique" ["*Immanente Kritik*"] that negated the totality from within the system itself, Adorno scorned the idea that one could perform a critique from outside the system (*ND* 58 and *Negative Dialektik* 76). Bernard's fate affirms Adorno's position, reminding Marx that he, too, is subject to the brave new world.

Adorno also reads this "detached, free, superior" bourgeois attitude in Huxley himself, arguing that his unwavering belief in individual consciousness ignores the problem of pleasure (and, indeed, the social dimension of the problem of pleasure). Adorno begins his critique by quoting the biological paper that Mond censors in *Brave New World*:

> It was the sort of idea that might easily decondition the more unsettled minds among the higher castes - make them lose their faith in happiness as the Sovereign Good and take to believing, instead, that the goal was somewhere beyond, somewhere outside the present

[234] "But whereas the physically defective Bernard had suffered all his life from the consciousness of being separate, it was only quite recently that, grown aware of his mental excess, Helmholtz Watson had also become aware of his difference from the people who surrounded him." (Huxley, *BNW* 79).
[235] We can see his contrarian nature in this exchange between Lenina and Bernard: "'Yes, I know,' said Bernard derisively. 'Even Epsilons are useful! So am I. And I damned well wish I weren't!' Lenina was shocked by his blasphemy. 'Bernard!' She protested in a voice of amazed distress. How can you?'" (Huxley, *BNW* 105).
[236] See also Bernard's view of himself: "'It makes me feel as though ...' he hesitated, searching for words with which to express himself, 'as though I were more *me*, if you see what I mean. More on my own, not so completely a part of something else. Not just a cell in the social body.'" (Huxley, *BNW* 105).

> human sphere, that the purpose of life was not the maintenance of well-being, but some intensification and refinement of consciousness, some enlargement of knowledge (Huxley, *BNW* 209 qtd. in Adorno, *Prisms* 106-07).

Adorno interprets this suppressed thesis as a representation of the contradiction of Huxley's individualism: that Mond is trying to repress the fact that the individual can simply use its superior intellect to escape the totalitarian system and its false consciousness. Adorno criticises Huxley for advocating such a transcendent solution, arguing that "'intensification and refinement of consciousness' or 'enlargement of knowledge' flatly hypostatise the mind in opposition to praxis and the fulfilment of material needs [,]" and that Huxley is also "[substituting] an indeterminable, abstract 'goal somewhere beyond' for 'faith in happiness'" (*Prisms* 106-07). On the first point, Adorno suggests that the *complete* primacy of the individual and individual consciousness – or what he would later call "constitutive subjectivity" – neglects the social and historical basis of individuality itself (*ND* 124). On the second point, Adorno argues that an idealist solution that ignores social structures and puts sole faith in the mind is inadequate: "Huxley criticizes the positivistic spirit. But because his criticism confines itself to shocks, while remaining immersed in the immediacy of experience and merely registering social illusions as facts, Huxley himself becomes a positivist." (*Prisms* 113). Adorno is charging Huxley with a very specific definition of positivism here: a position that puts its trust in unmediated or directly accessible facts, allowing socially constructed appearances to be taken as objective features of the world (*Der Positivismusstreit* 20).[237] Adorno's accusation that Huxley sees "social illusions as facts" is a further criticism of Huxley's individualism. Adorno is arguing that bourgeois empiricism sees capitalism as an objective system, even despite the inequalities that are baked into that very system. For Adorno, without a critical interrogation of the capitalist system, there is no way of debunking the very system's so-called objectivity. He concludes that a subject-orientated

[237] Adorno also commonly used the term "positivist" to describe a philosophy that insisted on understanding the world only through the scientific method. The way that Adorno uses "positivist" has since been interpreted as a misnomer, a relic of the so-called *Positivismusstreit* ["Positivism Debate"]. To elaborate, Adorno did not define Positivism in a conventional way, but used it as a label with which to criticise the critical rationalists such as Karl Popper. In his autobiography Popper complained that his position had been misrepresented and that he was actually critical of Positivism (*Autobiography* 88).

approach that leaps "beyond" a bad system without tackling its real *material* conditions is a false solution because it insidiously distracts from capitalism's proliferation of material inequality.[238]

Adorno holds that Huxley's insistence on a bourgeois individualism replicates the logic of capitalism.[239] First, Adorno gives an example of how Huxley allegedly reinforces the problem of deindividualisation:

> Humanity is placed before the choice between regression to a mythology questionable even to Huxley and progress towards total unfreedom of consciousness. No room is left for a concept of mankind that would resist absorption into the collective coercion of the system and reduction to the status of contingent individuals. The very construction which simultaneously denounces the totalitarian world-state and glorifies retrospectively the individualism that brought it about becomes itself totalitarian. In that it leaves no escape open, this conception itself implies the thing that horrifies Huxley, the liquidation of everything that is not assimilated. The practical consequence of the bourgeois 'Nothing to, be done', which resounds as the novel's echo, is precisely the perfidious 'You must adjust' of the totalitarian Brave New World. (*Prisms* 113)

By invoking "Nothing to be done" from Beckett's *Waiting for Godot,* Adorno riffs on Huxley's Protestantism (Beckett, *Waiting* 9; Adorno, *Prisms* 99).[240] He suggests that Huxley's argumentation is ascetic, offering no solution other than his problematic individualism. Adorno is irked by Huxley's refusal to give up his faith in the individual as an agent of a more utopian society: "Instead of antagonisms, Huxley envisages, something like an intrinsically non-self-contradictory total subject of technological reason, and correspondingly, a simplistic total development." (*Prisms* 113). Here, Adorno suggests that Huxley's call for more individualism merely enacts the logic of capitalist

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[238] As we will soon see, Adorno and Horkheimer were struck by how the members of the elite use mass culture to distract the average individual from noticing that their labour is being stolen from them to the extent that they cannot even satisfy their hunger.

[239] Just as Adorno criticised Huxley's nostalgic return to a fabled 'undistorted' high culture of the bourgeois era, he criticises Huxley for returning to the problematic figure of that era: the bourgeois individual.

[240] Adorno argues that Huxley's defeatist attitude inside and outside of his novel reflects "the ominous 'It shall not be otherwise' which is the end-product of the basic Protestant amalgamation of introspection and repression." (*Prisms* 116).

society; he reasons that the individual paraded by the Enlightenment "provides a pretext for the strengthening of domination" – in other words, that Huxley advocates for an instinct for domination in the individual that operates within the dominating spirit of capitalist society as a whole (113). Adorno suggests that, in ignoring the problems of his own solution, Huxley provides an *affirmative* utopia that provides "no escape" out of the culture industry. Adorno admonishes Huxley for refusing to conceive of a more negative praxis in which the world could genuinely be "otherwise" from capitalist society, or, as he says elsewhere on positive utopias: "It seems to me that what people have lost subjectively in regard to consciousness is very simply the capability to imagine the totality as something that could be completely different." (Adorno, *Prisms* 116; Adorno and Bloch, "Something's Missing" 4). From John's suicide to Bernard's banishment, the tragic fates of Huxley's heroes support Adorno's view that individualism leads to the domination of the individual under capitalism. For Adorno, a systemic change from capitalism is needed, not the subtle affirmation of the capitalist totality that he perceives in Huxley's individualism.

In particular, Adorno complains that Huxley replicates the capitalist corruption of pleasure, which he argues is especially perceptible in Huxley's "bourgeois cultural politics" (*Prisms* 106). As we previously discussed, Huxley's individualism was inflected by his view that modern culture had betrayed and actively damaged the highly intellectual and pleasurable culture of the past.[241] Adorno attacks what he sees as the reactionary character of this nostalgia, arguing that Huxley's desire to put the "products of traditional culture" in the place of modern culture represents the inadequacy of his attitude to pleasure (101). Adorno focuses on how Huxley uses John the Savage to promote the idea that only the "old things" engage the individual's mind and, therefore, represent true pleasure

[241] Adorno argues that, although Huxley is by no means uncritical of primitive societies, his narrative goes too far in advocating John's construction of a narrative about historical and society degeneration: that a pure and ancient high culture is being destroyed by the dominant, low culture of modern society (Adorno, *Prisms* 103). As Christoph Bode has stated, whilst it is difficult to summarise Huxley's lifelong cultural criticism, he nevertheless remained committed to his scepticism towards mass industrial society throughout his life (343). For a brief selection of examples of this scepticism, please see: his complaints about the proliferation of bad art in "The Spread of Bad Art" [1925], his first staunch critique against mass civilisation in *Proper Studies* [1927], his distaste at films in "Silence is Golden" [1930], his critique of Hollywood in *After Many a Summer* [1939] and *Ape and Essence* [1948], and his general cynicism about society in his final novel *Island* [1962].

(Huxley, *BNW* 165; Adorno, *Prisms* 101).[242] Adorno criticises Huxley's romanticisation of Shakespeare for its assumption that traditional culture itself was not also touched by reification:

> All the categories examined by the novel, family, parents, the individual and his property, are already products of reification. Huxley curses the future with it, without realizing that the past whose blessing he invokes is of the same nature. Thus he unwittingly becomes the spokesman of that nostalgia whose affinity to mass culture his physiognomic eye so acutely perceives in the test-tube song: 'Bottle of mine' [.] (*Prisms* 105).[243]

Adorno is referring to the song in the novel entitled "'Bottle of Mine'", which uses its lyrics to dignify the test tube that each citizen was decanted from. Although Mond admits that every bottle is an object of control that determines every individual according to its class, this song inverts the bottle into a comfort blanket that each citizen yearns for in an infantile fashion that resembles Freudian womb regression (Huxley, *BNW* 262-63).[244] Juxtaposed with the cultured, pleasurable Shakespeare plays that Mond has since banned, Huxley offers this song as a parody of the modern popular music that he associates with debased pleasure in "Pleasures" (34). Adorno argues that Huxley's apparent glorification of a bourgeois culture evokes the fatal logic that runs through his thinking: that if one merely resurrects the bourgeois individual, his culture, and his values of the past, then one will solve the problems of the modern culture industry. In response to Huxley's refusal to acknowledge the reification within Shakespeare, Adorno claims that despite "his critical tone, [Huxley] is in basic agreement with descriptively oriented cultural criticism, which, in lamenting the inexorable decline of culture, provides a pretext for the strengthening of domination." (*Prisms* 113). Again, Adorno intimates that Huxley replicates the culture industry's logic. He describes Huxley's cultural analysis as "descriptively orientated" because it is motivated by a question of cultural taste and not the

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[242] See Adorno's complaint that "[Huxley] rather flatly equates [the mind] with the products of traditional culture, exemplified by Shakespeare [.]" (*Prisms* 101). We can see this equation in the following exchange in the novel: "'But why is it prohibited?' asked the Savage. In the excitement of meeting a man who had read Shakespeare he had momentarily forgotten everything else. The Controller shrugged his shoulders. 'Because it's old; that's the chief reason. We haven't any use for old things here.'" (Huxley, *BNW* 258).

[243] Adorno is referring to the song in "Chapter 5" of *Brave New World* (Huxley 59).

[244] As Mond explains: "'Even after decanting, he's still inside a bottle - an invisible bottle of infantile and embryonic fixations. Each one of us, of course,' the Controller meditatively continued, 'goes through life inside a bottle.'" (Huxley, *BNW* 262-63).

question of the oppressive societal conditions of *all* culture. Adorno judges Huxley's distinction between traditional and modern culture to be largely irrelevant; he contends that because the cultivated culture that Huxley personally values also led to the degeneration of that very culture (and humanity itself), it makes no sense to defer to it uncritically as if it were an antidote to the problems of mutilated pleasure and deindividualisation.

Adorno eventually realises that Huxley is more invested in the resurrection of individuality than the resurrection of pleasure. Huxley reveals that one of the reasons why traditional culture is superior to modern culture is that it "never got a chance of fully satisfying [the appetite for distraction]" (*BNWR* 40). Here, Huxley suggests that distraction is an innate drive, but one that needs to be tabooed. He contrasts society's previous ability to repress this drive with modern society's absolute satisfaction of it, with "its non-stop distraction now provided by newspapers and magazines, by radio, television and the cinema." (40). Huxley continues: "Too much tension is a disease; but so is too little. There are certain occasions when we ought to be tense, when an excess of tranquillity (and especially of tranquillity imposed from the outside, by a chemical) is entirely inappropriate." (88). In trying to balance pleasure with tension, Huxley demonstrates that he is against unadulterated pleasure. Huxley uses the fictional "chemical" of soma to illustrate his position: "The loving cup of strawberry ice-cream *soma* was passed from hand to hand and, with the formula, 'I drink to my annihilation,' twelve times quaffed." (*BNW* 65). We can see that Huxley opposes the pleasure of his drug precisely because it causes the self-abandonment of the individual. But for Adorno, Huxley's rejection of soma's annihilation constitutes a rejection of pleasure. As we have discussed before, Huxley held that totalitarian regimes would use pleasure rather than pain. He inserts this view into the scene when Mond argues that his world is not the tragedy of "Othello's world […] People are happy, they get what they want, and they never want what they can't get" (259). Adorno argues that not all pleasure is oppressive: "[Huxley's] anger at false happiness sacrifices the idea of true happiness. […] The choice is between the barbarism of happiness and culture as the objectively higher condition that entails unhappiness." (*Prisms* 102, 111). Here, Adorno accuses Huxley of actively debasing pleasure itself. He disagrees with the notion that the excess of pleasure in soma is a problem, concluding that Huxley is not interested in happiness at all. By identifying Huxley's characterisation of culture and happiness

as mutually exclusive, Adorno notices that Huxley will hold on to individualism no matter the cost, *even* if it means that he has to sacrifice pleasure. With these flaws in mind, we will now explore how Adorno ultimately refuses to pursue individualism at the cost of genuine pleasure and instead proposes a more collective approach to the absence of genuine pleasure under capitalism.

**4. Adorno's Collective Response to the Problem of Pleasure**

Adorno's attitude to individualism is far more ambivalent than his reading of Huxley's novel might first suggest. His problematisation of Huxley's individualism provokes him to appeal to a different, more collective approach to the problem of pleasure. Adorno focuses on Huxley's thesis that humans are left to make the choice between "individualism and totalitarian world-state" (98 *Prisms*). He argues that this is a false choice; just as he contends that individual thought alone will not resolve the problems of the bourgeois society, he disputes the places where Huxley criticises the collective, especially in his ideas about overpopulation and centralisation. As Adorno continues: "No room is left for a concept of mankind that would resist absorption into the collective coercion of the system and reduction to the status of contingent individuals." (113). Here, he identifies that Huxley's individualism offers a narrow understanding of the collective, provoking Adorno to pose the collective organisation of society in a different light so that it might offer a way of resisting the debasement of pleasure. Adorno develops his own specific notion of a resisting, *collective* pleasure: "But every pleasure betrays idolisation: it is self-abandonment to an Other." (Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic* 82). Adorno invests several layers of meaning in his idea of collective pleasure. Primarily, he defines collective pleasure as a sexual one. As we will see, sometimes he suggests that a collective form of pleasure would resemble a libertine sexuality that finds pleasure in different sexual partners, thereby negating Huxley's morality that places taboos on free love – at least earlier on in his career. Adorno also argues that the sexual act with another partner (whether in a monogamous union or not) demands that one should recognise the other, that the self does not exist alone in a vacuum. What Adorno values most about collective pleasure is the potential for losing oneself into the utopian, orgiastic part of sex. This sexual self-annihilation is central to Adorno's

surprising interpretation of Lenina - who he deems the novel's representative of pleasure – as part of a more collective, sexual resistance against the falsity of modern pleasure.

Adorno glimpses Huxley's anti-collectivism in the author's rejection of "de Sade's statement that the rights of man include the absolute sexual disposition of all over all" (*Prisms* 105). In his "Foreword to Brave New World" [1946], Huxley argues that de Sade's philosophy centred on a sexual "revolution in individual men, women and children, whose bodies were henceforward to become the common sexual property of all and whose minds were to be purged of all the natural decencies, all the laboriously acquired inhibitions of traditional civilization." (xlv).[245] Huxley's moral principle of monogamy meant that *Brave New World* uses sexual examples to illustrate the debasement of individual-centred morality. He claims that the mass character of pleasure in the twentieth century was influenced by Sade's polyamorous and illegal sexual exploitation in *The 120 Days of Sodom*. Adorno identifies that Huxley takes "common property of all" as a metaphor for the collective societal structure of "all over all", or a type of social organisation that Huxley saw as leading to totalitarianism in its disorder, lack of hierarchy and reduction of individuals to a single mass. Adorno notes how Huxley parodies this collective organisation of pleasure in the novel's "orgy porgy", a state sanctioned ritual of group sex (*Prisms* 103). As Huxley describes the ritual:

> Orgy-porgy ... It was after midnight when the last of the helicopters took its flight. Stupefied by *soma*, and exhausted by a long-drawn frenzy of sensuality, the Savage lay sleeping in the heather. The sun was already high when he awoke. He lay for a moment, blinking in owlish incomprehension at the light; then suddenly remembered - everything. 'Oh, my God, my God!' He covered his eyes with his hand. (*BNW* 305).

By making John lose himself in the orgy rather than obeying the taboo placed upon it (i.e. the "laboriously acquired inhibitions"), Huxley provides us with a moral tale; he contrasts this moment of "incomprehension" with John's coming to his senses in the morning to suggest that orgies correspond with intellectual degeneration. John's shameful exclamation of "my God!" represents a coming-to-

[245] Adorno's full statement is as follows: "de Sade's statement that the rights of man include the absolute sexual disposition of all over all. In this, Huxley sees the foolishness of consequent reasoning consummated." (*Prisms* 105).

terms with the society and morality that the author approves of, as it implies that John *knows* his transgression is wrong. This moment of reawakening demonstrates that the reader is supposed to read this scene as a tragic loss of self-awareness that could still be remedied by individual thought.

Adorno rejects Huxley's characterisation of the collective here, arguing that it ignores the contemporary problem of needs. Adorno defines "the problem of needs" ["*zum Problem der Bedürfniss*"] as a material lack which prevents the masses from interrogating their system - or realising true pleasure - because their "false needs" distract them from their true needs (i.e. to get food for their hunger) (Adorno and Horkheimer, *Towards* 91; Adorno, *Prisms* 109).[246] Adorno claims that Huxley's individualism merely reinforces these false needs: "As a counterweight to the sphere of the satisfaction of needs, Huxley posits another, suspiciously similar to the one the bourgeoisie generally designates as that of the 'higher things'." (*Prisms* 108). Adorno argues that Huxley's plan to resurrect Shakespeare is a prime example of the promotion of false need, that Huxley's snobbery merely reinforces the masses' distraction. Adorno quotes Horkheimer's critique of Huxley in "On the Problem of Needs" ["Zum Problem der Bedürfnisse"] [1942]: "It is ridiculous to reproach chewing gum for diminishing the propensity for metaphysics, but it could probably be shown that Wrigley's profits and his Chicago palace have their roots in the social function of reconciling people to bad conditions and thus diverting them from criticism." (Adorno and Horkheimer, *Towards* 96 qtd. in Adorno, *Prisms* 108). This passage refers to Huxley's attack on Wrigley's in "Art and the Obvious", where he blames mass products such as gum for distracting the masses from intellectual reflection (78).[247] Adorno rejects this value-based criticism of Wrigley's, agreeing with Horkheimer that gum is not necessarily evil in itself and that merely replacing it with "higher things" does not solve the material problem at hand. For Adorno and Horkheimer, reification operates because most humans are distracted by a material lack (i.e. the basic resources needed to escape poverty) which leaves them with no energy to critique the system. Adorno holds that the problem of need cannot be solved in

[246] This point is compounded by the fact that Adorno presented these theses at a Frankfurt School seminar that convened in 1942 to discuss two subjects: Huxley's novel *Brave New World* and the problem of need. "Aldous Huxley and Utopia" reworked certain extracts from these "Thesen über Bedürfnis" ["Theses on Need"].
[247] It could also double as a critique of Huxley's parody of the aphrodisiac chewing gum in *Brave New World* (71).

capitalist society, reasoning that even if capitalism has the technological means to redistribute its resources to counter existing worldwide poverty, it ideologically refuses to do so (*Prisms* 107-08).[248] Adorno adapts Marx's slogan "to each according to his need ["*Bedürfnissen*"]" for his own utopian vision of a society that would distribute resources according to each person's specific circumstances (Marx, *Kritik* 13).[249] Like Huxley, Adorno's position reflects a questionable confidence that needs (as opposed to simple desires) can be accurately determined, often presenting his own appetite or taste as critique. Still, Adorno distinguishes his position by concluding that Huxley's generally individualistic conception of society fails to see the potential of changing the economic system to suit this more collective societal structure.[250]

Adorno goes as far as accusing Huxley of fundamentally rejecting the social dimension of society. As Adorno elaborates in his analysis of Huxley's characters:

> By putting [John] in the wrong, Huxley distances himself from social criticism. Its actual advocate in the novel is Bernard Marx, an Alpha-Plus who rebels against his own conditioning […] He does not question the authenticity of Bernard's critical insight. But the insight itself is attributed to, a sort of organic inferiority, the inevitable inferiority complex. […] Huxley charges the radical Jewish intellectual with vulgar snobbism and, ultimately, with reprehensible moral cowardice. (*Prisms* 105).

Adorno holds that Bernard's social criticism is not merely limited by his idealism, but by Huxley himself. The reduction of Bernard into a coward who betrays the ideals of his social commentary at the end of the novel admittedly registers some of Huxley's indifference to the *social* dimension of

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[248] "We criticise mass culture not because it gives men too much or makes their life too secure – that we may leave to Lutheran theology – but rather because it contributes to a condition in which men get too little and what they get is bad, a condition in which whole strata inside and out live in frightful poverty, in which men come to terms with injustice, in which the world is kept in a condition where one must expect on the one hand gigantic catastrophes and on the other clever elites conspiring to bring about a dubious peace." (Adorno, *Prisms* 107-08).
[249] The original quotation from the *Kritik des Gothaer Programms* is as follows: "*Jeder nach seinen Fähigkeiten, jedem nach seinen Bedürfnissen*" (Marx 13).
[250] As Martin Shuster and Iain Macdonald say in their translation of "Theses on Need": "The discussions revolved around two central themes: (i) Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World,* which presents the worrying portrait of 'frenzied material progress minus emancipation'; and (ii) the notion, suggested earlier in 1942 by Henry A. Wallace, that technological advancements could guarantee a ration of milk (and indeed food) to everyone in the world." (101). For a further discussion of Adorno's argument that inequality was getting in the way of genuine pleasure, see Owen Hulatt's online article "Against Popular Culture" [2018] (n.p.).

society. This indifference is confirmed in *Brave New World Revisited*, where Huxley likens a collective organisation of society to a collection of "termites":

> *Brave New World* presents a fanciful and somewhat ribald picture of a society, in which the attempt to recreate human beings in the likeness of termites has been pushed almost to the limits of the possible. […] Consequences hardly less undesirable are likely to follow the general adoption of a Social Ethic, based upon the erroneous view that ours is a fully social species, that human infants are born uniform and that individuals are the product of conditioning by and within the collective environment. […] For the individual termite, service to the termitary is perfect freedom. But human beings are not completely social; they are only moderately gregarious. (78).

Huxley would contend that he presents his characters as termites to make a political point about the dehumanisation of individuals in contemporary society. His essay demonstrates that he sees society as fundamentally made up of individuals, resisting a bigger structure of governance lest it flatten out their individuality and lead to a centralised concentration of power into a few hands (34). But there is a sense that Huxley actually contributes towards the dehumanisation of the individuals within the collective. Take the following passage from the novel: "Like aphides and ants, the leaf-green Gamma girls, the black Semi-Morons swarmed round the entrances, or stood in queues to take their places in the monorail tram-cars. […] 'My word,' said Lenina, 'I'm glad I'm not a Gamma.'" (*BNW* 73-74). Huxley's position is not unlike Lenina's. Huxley's emphasis on the biological superiority of the intellectual aristocracy often dehumanises the masses who are not a part of this elite class. Indeed, his physiognomic reading of Bernard Marx as physically and, therefore, intellectually degenerate accords with his dehumanisation of the lower classes into various insects in the novel and his reduction of the collective into termites in his essay. Huxley's negative presentation of a society that recognises and cares for the *other* over the self-interest of the individual - especially in its acknowledgement of the social relations that tie individuals together in society (i.e. the individual termite's service to the termitary, as Huxley dismissively puts it) - lends itself more to reifying the humans within the collective than resisting that reification.

Adorno accuses Huxley of eschewing a collective response to the mutilation of modern pleasure: “The mechanical repetition of the phrase, ‘Everybody’s happy now,’ becomes the most extreme accusation. When men are products of an order based on denial and deception, and that order implants imaginary needs in them, then the happiness which is defined by the satisfaction of such needs is truly bad.” (*Prisms* 109). We can see why Adorno ascribes this “extreme accusation” to Huxley if we turn to one of the most crucial invocations of the slogan “Everybody’s happy now” in the novel:

> ‘Don't you wish you were free, Lenina?’ ‘I don't know what you mean. I am free. Free to have the most wonderful time. Everybody's happy nowadays.’ He laughed, ‘Yes, 'Everybody's happy nowadays.' We begin giving the children that at five. But wouldn't you like to be free to be happy in some other way, Lenina? In your own way, for example; not in everybody else's way.’ (Huxley, *BNW* 106).

Of course, Adorno appreciates that Huxley uses Bernard to critique false need. As we discussed previously, Huxley uses the slogan “everybody’s happy nowadays” to describe how the regime uses mass, false pleasures to prevent its citizens from realising that they are not genuinely happy. However, Adorno suggests in his description of the slogan as an “accusation” that Huxley judges the pursuit of pleasure to be ultimately “worthless” – namely, when it does not personally benefit Huxley’s self-interest (*Prisms* 104). Adorno argues that Huxley offers this slogan sarcastically, but not only in the sense that Huxley reveals this to be a *false* happiness that is covertly coercive for each individual, but also in the sense that he sees no value in the realisation of *genuine* happiness for the whole of society either: “[Huxley] foresees a development to the greatest happiness of the greatest number, but it discomfits him.” (114). To unpack this accusation, we should turn to what Adorno sees as the precondition for realising happiness for all:

> Once scarcity has disappeared, the relationship of need to satisfaction will change. Today the compulsion to produce for needs mediated and petrified by the market is one of the chief means of keeping everyone on the job. Nothing may be thought, written, done, or made that transcends a condition which maintains its power largely through the needs of its victims. It is

> inconceivable that the compulsion to satisfy needs would remain a fetter in a changed society. (108-09).

This extract outlines Adorno's view that the majority of citizens in society can only grasp happiness after their material lack has been addressed. But there is the rub; he also holds that Huxley's position relies exactly on the frustration of a socialist society, that Huxley's apparent bourgeois ideology maintains the status quo of capitalism (115).[251] In this case, not only would Huxley sacrifice his own pleasure, but he would also sacrifice other people's pleasure in pursuit of individualism.

Adorno turns specifically to the topic of *sexual* pleasure to illustrate where he believes Huxley gets pleasure and the collective wrong. He sets up this critique by first outlining the mechanics behind Huxley's view that modern culture perverts true sexual pleasure. Adorno focuses on Huxley's female protagonist, Lenina Crowne, and reads her as a symbol of "artificial charm and cellophane shamelessness" (*Prisms* 104). Adorno notes that Huxley uses Lenina to illustrate how modern culture uses pornography to distract the masses from cultivated, intellectual thoughts (104). Adorno is correct that the narrative encourages the reader to respond negatively to Lenina's sexuality. Take, for example, the dynamic of Bernard and Lenina's relationship:

> For answer, he lifted one hand from the controls and, slipping his arm around her, began to fondle her breasts. 'Thank Ford,' she said to herself, 'he's all right again.' Half an hour later they were back in his rooms. Bernard swallowed four tablets of soma at a gulp, turned on the radio and television and began to undress. 'Well,' Lenina enquired, with significant archness when they met next afternoon on the roof, 'did you think it was fun yesterday?' Bernard nodded. They climbed into the plane. A little jolt, and they were off. 'Every one says I'm awfully pneumatic,' said Lenina reflectively, patting her own legs. 'Awfully.' But there was an expression of pain in Bernard's eyes. 'Like meat,' he was thinking. She looked up with a certain anxiety. 'But you don't think I'm too plump, do you?' He shook his head. Like so much meat. 'You think I'm all right.' Another nod. 'In every way?' 'Perfect,' he said aloud.

[251] See, for example, Huxley's view that capitalist work is preferable to leisure (*Complete* 293)

> And inwardly. 'She thinks of herself that way. She doesn't mind being meat.' Lenina smiled triumphantly. But her satisfaction was premature. (Huxley, *BNW* 107-08).

Lenina interprets that this grope has halted Bernard's blasphemous ideas, that it has distracted him from genuinely interrogating society. But Bernard's uncomfortable and contrived sexual gesture represents the novel's wider message that modern sexuality is degraded. For instance, Huxley presents Lenina as a passive robot designed for the pleasure of different men; the "patting [of] her own legs" alludes to her polyamorous sexuality. As well as a reference to air-filled tires, Huxley uses "pneumatic" as an epithet for Lenina's sexuality, using its connotations of a mechanical pneumatic drill to evoke her sexuality's emptiness.[252] Even when Bernard describes Lenina as "perfect", his thoughts expose that this perfection is, at its base, the cynical reduction of a woman into meat. This scene demonstrates that this version of pleasure is not enough to satisfy either Lenina or Bernard. Just as Bernard is dissatisfied with Lenina, she is dissatisfied with him when he criticises their society the following day (108).[253]

Having set this example up, Adorno suddenly condemns Huxley's stance on sex in the novel as reactionary. Adorno explains that: "Like that of many emancipated Englishmen, his consciousness is preformed by the very Puritanism he abjures." (*Prisms* 102). Adorno is correct that, at least in *Brave New World,* Huxley promotes a Puritan view of sex in the sense that the novel mostly offers representations of sex that are perverse and unchaste, just as the narrative intimates that oversexualisation is a sign of contemporary society's corrupted culture.[254] If we turn to the example that Adorno concentrates on, Lenina and John the Savage's relationship, we see this view on two levels. Lenina bristles with horror at John's claim that in Malpais people get married and only have sex within monogamous marital unions (Huxley, *BNW* 225). Secondly, the pornographic and non-consensual representation of interracial sex shown on screen in the novel's cinematic scene is read by

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[252] Huxley had previously taken the phrase "pneumatic bliss" from T.S. Eliot's poem "Whispers of Immortality" to describe the flappers that he encountered in America (Eliot, *The Collected* 47; Huxley, *Jesting* 298).
[253] See when the narrator states that: "[Bernard] began to talk a lot of incomprehensible and dangerous nonsense." (Huxley, *BNW* 80-81).
[254] Adorno's diagnosis of Huxley's Puritanism (in the sense of being against sex) is not fully representative of Huxley's more ambivalent attitude to sex in his various fictional and non-fictional writings. Take, for instance, the discussion of sex in Huxley's final novel *Island.* Murugan's complaint that in Pala there is "No progress, only sex, sex, sex [,]" rings out as a hollow, capitalist lament (156).

John to be in bad taste (or "base [and] ignoble") in contrast to his desire for love within the confines of marriage (200).[255] By contrasting Lenina's "matter-of-fact", unflinching attitude to her libertine society with John's moral horror at that sexual status quo, Adorno picks up on the fact that *Brave New World* offers a society in which its formulation of the sexual domain is diametrically opposed to *good* taste (*Prisms* 104).[256] Although this critique of Lenina's values seems exactly like the kind of analysis Adorno would make in, say, his culture industry essays, he emphasises that, surprisingly, he does not subscribe to this Puritan understanding of Lenina's sexuality: "[The attributes of Lenina] produce by no means the un-erotic effect Huxley intended, but rather a highly seductive one, to which even the infuriated cultural savage succumbs at the end of the novel." (104).

Adorno's disagreement here is based upon his view that Huxley's prudish critique of sex comes too close to the culture industry's pornographic, false pleasure. As we discussed previously, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* Adorno and Horkheimer criticise capitalism for refusing to provide the sexual pleasure that it pretends to promise in pornography: "There is no erotic situation in which innuendo and incitement are not accompanied by the clear notification that things will never go so far." (111). Accordingly, Adorno treats intercourse in capitalism in dialectical terms: that the so-called sexual pleasure of the culture industry betrays genuine sexual pleasure with its endless deferral of something that falsely resembles pleasure (i.e. that the object of sex does not match up with its concept, or that the sex promised by capitalism does not match up with how sex ought to be). Crucially, Adorno does not accept Huxley's presentation of the gap between sexual concept and object in which Lenina's promiscuous, contraceptive-laden sexuality as an object does not match up with the romanticised imago of Shakespeare's Juliet that John the Savage projects onto her (*BNW* 216).[257] Adorno contends that the absence of the idealised woman is not the same as the absence of

[255] "'Like this horrible film.' 'Horrible?' Lenina was genuinely astonished. 'But I thought it was lovely.' 'It was base,' he said indignantly, 'it was ignoble.'" (Huxley, *BNW* 200).
[256] Adorno reads Lenina's and John's conflicting reactions to the film in his essay on Huxley, taking care to show the gap between John's romanticism and Lenina's cool attitude about her own society's values: "The conflict arises from the fact that John feels the pretty girl's matter-of-fact abandonment to be a debasement of his sublime passion for her and runs away." (*Prisms* 104).
[257] See Adorno's confusion at John the Savage's (and Huxley's) elevation of the "selfless passion" of Romeo and Juliet as "'something like a value'" (Huxley, *BNW* 216; Adorno, *Prisms* 107).

genuine pleasure which, whether sexual or otherwise, he holds has not yet materialised in contemporary society (*Prisms* 104).

Adorno's surprising reading of Lenina as a representative of pleasure draws upon Huxley's female character – not Huxley's position – to formulate a more collective response to capitalism's denial of pleasure: "Lenina's artificial charm and cellophane shamelessness produce by no means the un-erotic effect Huxley intended, but rather a highly seductive one [.]" (*Prisms* 104-05). Adorno argues that Lenina is not the symbol of the corruption of sexual pleasure as Huxley intends her to be, but that she is a figure of *genuine* sexual pleasure. As we discussed previously, Adorno's reputation as a so-called cultural mandarin tempts the reader to assume that he would share Huxley's disapproval of a hypersexual woman. In the later essay on "Sexual Taboos" [1963], Adorno would go on to describe the neutralisation of sexual pleasure as a product of capitalism in similar terms that he used to describe Lenina's "cellophane" ["*zellophanhafte*"] allure: "as it were, [rubber]-wrapped [standardised] samples of sex" ["*ebenso aber auch den gleichwie in Gummi gehüllten Serienmustern des Sexus*"]. (Adorno, *Kulturkritik* 107, 538 and "Sexual Taboos" 76). There, Adorno uses the images of a plastic-like, artificial and mass-produced veneer to describe a false sexuality that is repressed by sexual taboos ["*Sexualtabus*"] and consequently "desexualis[ed]", "standardised", "neutralise[d]" and "blanch[ed]" ("Sexual" 73). And yet, Adorno suddenly distinguishes himself from even Bernard, the supposedly more critical character of the novel. Whilst Bernard also considers Lenina's promiscuity to be a debasement of sexual pleasure, Adorno maintains that it is precisely Lenina's libertine sexuality that might offer a glimpse of pleasure in the brave new world, "cellophane shamelessness" and all.

Adorno's interpretation of Lenina is inflected by his (albeit problematic) interest in the critical potential of multiple sexual affairs with women. Adorno's ideas about sexual liberation in the mid-twentieth[th] century resembled those of his colleague Herbert Marcuse in *Eros and Civilisation* [1955]. In his construction of a non-repressive society, Marcuse suggests that the homosexual act is a resistant act against society because it has no procreative end (171).[258] Adorno offered a heterosexual version

[258] However, Adorno also shared with Marcuse certain reservations about the radical potential of sex, especially after the dawn of the 1960s Sexual Revolution. As Jeffrey Escoffier explains in an encyclopaedia entry

of Marcuse's argument that justified extra-marital affairs with women as an intellectual endeavour, designating the female body as a site of resistance in capitalist society.[259] Once again, Adorno exposes that he is determining what true pleasure looks like, offering a self-serving theory that is condescending towards the women whose bodies he uses for his so-called critique. For instance, Adorno proposed that the solution to the commodity fetishism suffered particularly by women is "sexual fetishism" (i.e. sex with women) in "A Letter from Adorno to Erich Fromm" [1937] (10).[260] In *Minima Moralia,* he argues that the female "wound" might offer a refuge against the non-pleasure of a dominating (in this case, patriarchal) society:

> Whatever is in the context of bourgeois delusion called nature, is merely the scar of social mutilation. If the psychoanalytical theory is correct that women experience their physical constitution because of castration, their neurosis gives them an inkling of the truth. The woman who feels herself a wound when she bleeds knows more about herself than the one who imagines herself a flower because that suits her husband. (95).

Adorno offers a psychoanalytic interpretation of the woman's genitalia as a "wound". The word "*Kastration*" ["castration"] confirms that Adorno invokes Freud's notion that the woman is a castrated man (*Minima Moralia: Reflexionen* 51). Yet Adorno's description of the wound as "social" rather than "natural" attacks how capitalism presents itself as the sole state of organising society. He indicates that the wound is an affliction caused by society, not woman's natural state. Adorno appropriates the wound as a radically negative motif; as society presents itself as the idealised concept, the wound is a disruptive presence that shows the discrepancy between the pleasurable concept of society that the brave new world pushes and its painful object. The wound is a symbol of otherness that can represent the negative identity between how society should be, and how it is (see my similar discussion of the wound in the previous chapter). It is for this reason that Adorno

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"Marcuse, Herbert (1898-1979)" [2004]: "After the publication of *Eros and Civilization,* Marcuse experienced serious misgivings about sexual liberation as it played out in America's advanced industrial society. He was increasingly concerned that it was impossible to achieve sexual liberation in an advanced capitalist society." (2-3).

[259] See Adorno's view that his mentor Berg's affairs "were a part of his 'production apparatus' from the very outset." (Adorno qtd. in Müller-Doohm 535).

[260] A crude, literal interpretation of the term "commodity fetishism".

problematically suggests the man's physical use of the woman's body recuperates a genuine, radical pleasure.

In light of this approach to women's bodies, it is perhaps not so surprising that Adorno was drawn to the fictional woman Lenina as a representative of a libertine and collective pleasure. First, Adorno defends a hedonistic sexuality in response to what he claims is Huxley's reinforcement of societal sexual taboos. He takes Huxley's invocation of Freud in the novel as his example. In *Brave New World,* Freud is characterised as determining humanity with the Oedipus Complex:

> Our Ford – or Our Freud, as, for some inscrutable reason, he chose to call himself whenever he spoke of psychological matters – Our Freud had been the first to reveal the appalling dangers of family life. The world was full of fathers – was therefore full of misery; full of mothers – therefore of every kind of perversion from sadism to chastity [.] (Huxley 43-44).

Huxley's narrative parodies Freud as foisting the taboo of the incestuous-murderous instinct onto the family, therefore leading to the family's dissolution. Adorno rejects this parody, arguing that Freud's theory actually rejected the determinism of infantile sexuality (*Prisms* 103).[261] Adorno's assessment of Huxley's reading of Freud is not completely accurate, at least not in the logic of the novel itself; Mond renounces the taboo with the information Ford/Freud has given him by making sure that children are not born to parents but created in test-tubes.[262] He ensures that they are not determined by the incest instinct and therefore cannot find pleasure in breaking it (Huxley, *BNW* 9).[263] Still, Adorno's interpretation grasps the fact that he and Huxley take different views on the *relation* of taboo to the sexual act itself. In his analysis of the novel's depiction of the Oedipus complex, Adorno

[261] "Huxley ascribes to the world of the future the encouragement of infantile sexuality, in complete misunderstanding, incidentally, of Freud, who all too orthodoxly adhered to instinctual renunciation as a pedagogical aim." (Adorno, *Prisms* 103).
[262] Of course, Adorno is correct that Huxley himself felt that Freud had poisoned the family with the Oedipus complex taboo, but the Freud in the novel does not necessarily seem to advocate the sexual instinct or the taboo.
[263] As Brad Buchanan has noted, the scholarship on Huxley and psychoanalysis has not reached a consensus on Huxley's attitude to psychoanalysis because Huxley has an "apparent ambivalence about Freud's ideas" (75). See also Huxley's explanation to his father about how his novel parodies "quite possible biological inventions as the production of children in bottle, (with the consequent abolition of the family and all the Freudian complexes for which family relationships are responsible)." (Huxley, *Letters* 35).

contends that it is not Freud but Huxley who believes that (sexual) pleasure can only be achieved by both the maintenance *and* transgression of societal taboos:

> Whether happiness is dependent upon the existence of prohibitions to be broken is an endless dialectical question, but the novel's mentality distorts the question into an affirmative answer, into an excuse for the perpetuation of obsolete taboos – as if the happiness produced by the transgression of taboos could ever legitimate the taboo, which exists not for the sake of happiness but for its frustration. (*Prisms* 103).

Although we will see below that Adorno was often ambivalent on the topic of taboos and pleasure, here Adorno resists the idea that sexual pleasure should *necessarily* be connected to or defined by taboos. He conflates Huxley's dogmatic belief in sex within marriage with the culture industry's maintenance of repressive societal taboos, interpreting the novel's parody of a utopia that is against "[f]amily, monogamy, romance" as something that exposes Huxley's implicit sympathy for those very values and, consequently, *Sexualtabus* (Huxley, *BNW* 45).

Against Huxley, Adorno instead suggests that the book's unfettered, polyamorous sexual pleasure provides a line of resistance against the corruption of pleasure in capitalism. Initially, Adorno advocates for the complete renunciation of *Sexualtabus*: "Were its power to be broken, were pleasure to be freed of the institutional reins which bind it even in the 'orgy-porgy', *Brave New World* and its fatal rigidity would dissolve." (*Prisms* 104).[264] This statement centres on the novel's ritualistic orgies, or the orgy-porgy. Although Adorno acknowledges that the book's orgy porgy is a state-sanctioned activity and is consequently constrained ["*sie bändigt*"] by the culture industry's tabooing of pleasure, his statement does not completely disregard the claim made in the song's final line - that the "[orgy-porgy] gives release" (Adorno, *Prismen* 106; Huxley, *BNW* 98). Adorno's reading appropriates and subverts the Freudian notion of *bändigen* ["to control" or "to bind"] energy; even though Freud oscillated between the relative values of unbinding and binding the sexual drive, Adorno pursues the total unbinding of sexual energy.[265] The qualifier "*auch*" – that he *also* ["*auch*"] locates a critical

[264] "*Wäre es durchbrochen, wäre die Lust den Zügel des Institutionellen los, der auch in der orgy-porgy sie bändigt*." (*Prismen* 106)
[265] See Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (*The Standard Edition Vol. 18* 1-64).

pleasure ["*Lust*"] in the "orgy-porgy" - suggests that the sexual practices that Huxley intended as a gross parody contain a germ of utopia that needs to be freed.[266] This interpretation touches upon a desire that Adorno expresses elsewhere - that unfettered sexual hedonism might offer one of the last few refuges of pleasure: "He alone who could situate utopia in blind somatic pleasure ["*blinden somatischen Lust*"], which, satisfying the ultimate intention, is intentionless, has a stable and valid idea of truth." (Adorno, *MM* 61 and *Minima Moralia: Reflexionen* 31). If we break down the phrase "blind somatic pleasure", we see that Adorno throws off the reins of reason from pleasure. He emphasises a specifically physical (somatic) rather than intellectual pleasure, characterising the sexual act as "blind" in the sense that the orgasm acts as a rejection of the world as it currently stands. Adorno promotes sexual hedonism as a way of subverting instrumental thinking (i.e. means-ends rationality), thereby recovering a genuine, unthinking bodily pleasure in a society otherwise devoid of it.

Adorno further complicates this relation of sex to taboo by seeing something critical in the *breaking* of taboo found in an alternative sexuality. In "Sexual Taboos", Adorno reveals that he likely held a dialectical attitude to the constraints placed on the "orgy-porgies" in the book: "There is no other response to this than that sexual liberation in contemporary society is mere illusion. [...] Whereas sexuality has been integrated, that which cannot be integrated, the actual spiciness of sex, continues to be detested by society." (72-73). Adorno is self-conscious that this essay stands in as a defence of the "alternative sexuality" of prostitutes, who he defends from the moral condemnation of bourgeois society. Even though Adorno's description of sexual liberation above as "mere illusion" ["*bloßer Schein*"] exposes his reservations about the critical potential of the 1960s Sexual Revolution (i.e. that it merely became monetised by capitalism and was stripped of its critical power), Adorno's theory advocates in some places a *tabooed,* resistant quality to certain sexual practices ("Sexualtabus" 534). The fact that he describes this quality as a "spiciness" ["*sexuelle Aroma*"] (or literally "sexual flavouring"), a phrase which he uses as a synonym for the notion of "indecency" ["*Unanständigen*"], indicates that Adorno also valued sexual practices that *remain* unacceptable to society ("Sexual

[266] As suggested by Adorno's presentation of the orgy-porgy as a type of pleasure that is bound by reins (*Prisms* 104).

Taboos" 73 and "Sexualtabus" 535). Adorno considered that a total, "*blinden* […] *Lust*" might also be achieved *via* the very taboos that he otherwise desired to negate. Adorno's ambivalent attitude to the renunciation of taboos can be understood as a compromise, that he treats capitalism's taboos in the same manner as the woman's wound: whilst the taboo is a remnant of the pain inflicted by capitalism, it simultaneously represents a breach, a negative identity *within* capitalism that points to the fact that it does not represent an ideal society.

Adorno consequently uses the novel to agitate for the self-abandonment of the individual in order to achieve genuine pleasure in society. Adorno opposes Huxley's reading of de Sade's libertine philosophy, embracing the philosophy of "all over all" against what he terms Huxley's model of "one over others" (*Prisms* 105). Whilst he interprets the latter as a dominating structure that cancels out pleasure, he interprets the former as a standpoint that recognises everyone's right to pleasure. Moreover, he sees something attractive in the dissolution of the individual into a wider collective. Adorno's drive to self-abandonment seems quite strange for someone who placed critical theory at the forefront of his resistance against reification (*MM* 18). However, Adorno argues that the self-abandonment of sexual intercourse resists the problem of individualism because: "It's a nice bit of sexual utopia not to be yourself, and to love more in the beloved than only her: a negation of the ego-principle." ("Sexual Taboos" 75). Once again, Adorno promotes the idea that utopia can be glimpsed *within* society through sexual intercourse with women. Specifically, he argues that the sexual act is a collective one, that pleasure and one's recognition of the other throws off the reifying "demand for identity" (76). This presentation of happiness *as* self-abandonment in "Sexualtabus" certainly sheds light on Adorno's alternative reading of *Brave New World.* Adorno's argument in *Prisms* would actually suggest that, for example, John's loss of individuality in the orgy-porgy is a victory and not the tragedy that Huxley presents it as. Indeed, the description of John's libertine drunkenness with "soma, and exhausted by a long-drawn frenzy of sensuality" which leads to the loss of reason - or "owlish incomprehension" – accords very much with Adorno's privileged notion of an orgiastic, "*blinden somatische Lust*". Adorno treats this pleasure's blindness, with its negation of a dominating, capitalist form of individuality, as a price worth paying for pleasure. It is in this loss of identity that Adorno glimpses utopia rather than dystopia – a reversal of his account of Odysseus in *Dialectic of*

*Enlightenment*. As a type of pleasure that exists for itself, Adorno holds that blind somatic lust resists the capitalist logic of society where everything has its price. Adorno locates in the sexual act a point of resistance in which one could begin to glimpse a way of organising society differently. He holds that recognising society's actual diversity in place of a self-interested logic would encourage each citizen to question and throw off the reins of the current dominating structure of capitalism.

And yet, Adorno's celebration of a self-abandoning, collective sexual pleasure affirms the ambivalence of his attitude to individualism. If we examine further Adorno's suggestion that self-abandonment will allow us to recuperate pleasure, we see that this is presented as a dialectical way of satisfying the aims of critical theory. For instance, in Adorno's psychoanalytic aphorism "This Side of the Pleasure Principle", he explains: "He alone who could situate utopia in blind somatic pleasure, which, satisfying the ultimate intention, and in itself without any intention, has a stable and valid idea of truth." (*MM* 61). Here, we see that Adorno conceives the pursuit of pleasure as bound up with the search for the truth. Adorno's commitment to finding the so-called truth content in his critical theory means that he does not totally dispense with the individual and individual reason. True to his ambivalent attitude towards individualism, *Minima Moralia*'s introduction demonstrates that he locates a kind of critical thought within the self-abandonment achieved through the sexual act: "In face of the totalitarian unison with which the eradication of difference is proclaimed as a purpose in itself, even part of the social force of liberation may have temporarily withdrawn to the individual sphere. If critical theory lingers there, it is not only with a bad conscience." (18). Here, Adorno exposes his hope that the self-annihilated individual may nevertheless contain a residual resistance that may hold the key to the future possibility of thinking critically again. This oscillation sheds light on why Adorno turns to *Brave New World* and the promiscuous sexuality of Lenina: he is committed to pleasure as a good and reads this good in Huxley in interesting and surprising ways. Like a snake biting its tail, Adorno hopes the book's depiction of a blind, somatic pleasure might one day allow him to find pleasure in thinking.

# Conclusion

In September 1967, Beckett sent a note to the Parisian hotel where Adorno was staying to cancel a meeting that they had arranged: “I can't make it. Forgive. Bless you. Sam. Beckett.” (Beckett qtd. in Tiedemann 75). Whilst Beckett’s cancellation would have disappointed Adorno, the memento from the famous Irish playwright would have also thrilled him. Adorno ended up keeping the note, which can still be found amongst his personal papers at the Frankfurt Adorno Archive today. As a note that is written in English and with a brevity that is fairly typical to Beckettian narrative, this piece of ephemera is representative of Adorno’s enthusiastic, serious and yet often strange engagement with Anglophone modernist writing.

In this thesis, I sought to outline the shape of and mechanics behind Adorno's intellectual engagement with Anglophone modernist literature. By outlining Adorno’s negatively dialectical approach to four different writers, I demonstrated how Adorno saw their texts as cognitive tools that could represent the non-identity between concepts and objects under capitalism, thereby offering the possibility of unsealing this identity thinking in order to relate to objects in a way that is not brutally instrumental. Through this thesis, I have proved the critical role that Anglophone writers have played in the history, formation and development of Adorno’s theory, therefore redressing the general neglect of the presence and significance of Anglophone writers in Adorno’s work in the wider scholarship.

In my chapter on Adorno and Dickens, I outlined how Adorno’s interest in Anglophone literature began relatively early on in his career and anticipated not only his other literary criticism, but his life-long philosophical project of developing a way of naming and negating false consciousness. Although Dickens is often presented as a realist, bourgeois writer, my analysis reveals that he was a modernist writer to Adorno in the sense that Adorno drew upon him for an allegorical, anti-capitalist reading of the false consciousness that arose out of the British Industrial Revolution.

In my chapter on Adorno and Joyce, I shed light on the actual shape of Adorno’s interest in Joyce. Considering Joyce’s status as one of the most canonical modernist writers of the twentieth century, it has been surprising to see that the precise details of his presence in Adorno’s writings have been overlooked in the scholarship. It is especially surprising that Adornian and Joycean Studies have

both overlooked the archival evidence of Adorno's work on Joyce, just as they have generally neglected Helms' Joycean work *Fa:m' Ahniesgwow.* By looking at Adorno's published and unpublished writings and examining Helms' musical-poem more directly, I have been able to offer a different way of approaching the curious omissions in Adorno's engagement with the writer that avoids the speculative strategy of R.B. Kershner, who assumes that Adorno probably read *Ulysses* based on the fact that both Adorno and Joyce adapted Homer's *Odyssey.*

In my chapter on Adorno and Beckett, I looked at the motivations behind Adorno's famous appreciation and philosophical interpretation of Beckett's work. The existing scholarship is well aware that Beckett was one of Adorno's favourite writers, but we are perhaps closer to responding to Beckett's statement in his letter to Barbara Bray the day after meeting Adorno: "Don't know why he likes me or why I like him." (Beckett qtd. in Van Hulle and Nixon 169). Adorno's preoccupation with what he perceives to be the American distortion of European psychoanalysis illuminates many of his readings of the scenes in *The Unnamable* and *Endgame*.

In my chapter on Adorno and Huxley, I challenged what is often an enduring view even within Adornian Studies: that he only valued the high modernist art of the likes of Proust or Beckett for his critical literary theory. His interest in Huxley's science fiction as well as in the critical, pleasurable potential of Lenina's libertine, polyamorous sexuality complicates this perception of his literary tastes. In turn, I demonstrated where Adorno entertains throwing away the tether of a rational, enlightened individualism in order to, dialectically, resurrect the possibility of the pleasure of thinking again.

Whilst I have argued for the centrality of these writers, it must be conceded that he often read these writers at a remove or manhandled their work. These readings do betray their own limits; for example, Adorno frequently offers his own very specific readings of the texts, or even instrumentalises Anglophone modernist literature for his own theory. Yet this instrumental quality of his readings is compelling, often resulting in creative outcomes (all too creative, of course, if Unseld's anecdote about Beckett's response to "Trying to Understand Endgame" is to be believed).

Just as the note from Beckett represents Adorno's engagement with Anglophone modernist literature, it also evokes the missed chances and absences in Adorno's literary criticism. Indeed,

Adorno's unexpected death in 1969 left many of his intended projects unfinished and much of his thought on literature unelaborated. Adorno's notes on Beckett's *The Unnamable* are a case in point; whilst we have Adorno's enlightening comments on the copy of *Der Namenlose,* Adorno never got to realise his plans to write an essay on the novel. Similarly, Adorno's exile – which entailed moving many times – meant that the library in his archive is incomplete and cannot tell us the whole story of what he would have read and even discussed with friends during his life. Whilst some of Adorno's unpublished writings or lesser-discussed pieces have helped to address the gaps in the secondary criticism, this study has been a lesson in accepting the fact that some curious omissions cannot be filled. For example, the fact that Adorno praised Joyce and yet did not leave behind solid evidence that he closely read *Ulysses* or the *Wake* provokes many unanswered and perhaps unanswerable questions.

Despite these gaps, I hope that this thesis could be used as a blueprint with which researchers of English literature might treat theorists beyond Adorno. Rather than viewing theory as something that is merely applied to literature (although, as we have seen, Adorno certainly applies his own, often unfaithful theory, to literature), my general motivation has been to show how Anglophone literature has played an active role in the development of the philosophy of one of the most important theorists of the twentieth century.

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