Adorno, Foucault, and the History of the Present

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A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

School of Philosophy and Art History

Year of Award 2017

Acknowledgements

Abstract

This thesis provides an exploration of Theodor Adorno's and Michel Foucault's works that aims to comparatively assess the explanatory and anticipatory-reconstructive potential of their common attempt to elaborate a critico-theoretical account of modern Western society, with a view to showing the compatibility of their perspectives.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. Discussing Adorno's picture of the exchange society and Foucault's early analytics of power, Chapter 1 investigates their complementary claims about the disciplinary construction of modern individuals, while examining the role of scientific and ideological discourses in this process. After clarifying the connection they establish between capitalism and modern biopower, Chapter 2 shows that the relevance of Adorno's insights remains largely confined to the 20th century welfare state, whereas Foucault's later inquiries present an illuminating exposition of the political rationality marking the contemporary forms of neoliberal government. Chapter 3 engages in an overdue comparison of Adorno's and Foucault's critical approaches. I argue that they converge in a genealogical problematization of the present, which aims at modifying their addressees' sensibility in order to encourage its radical transformation. In contrast to the view that they lack normative theorizing, Chapter 4 reviews Adorno's and Foucault's accounts of the normativity of critique, while illustrating their common attempt at reaffirming the emancipatory thrust of Enlightenment modernity. Chapter 5 examines their responses to the ethico-political challenges of the present through a comparison of Adorno's ethics of resistance with Foucault's late politics of the governed. The chapter terminates by suggesting a potential integration of Foucault's call for creative resistance with Adorno's politics of suffering.

The conclusion reviews Adorno's and Foucault's merits in the construction of a critical "ontology of the present" that stands opposed to the neo-Idealist turn of much of contemporary critical theory, while eventually arguing in favour of Foucault's more effective approach.

Contents

Introduction

Nothing hides the common nature of a problem better
than two similar ways of approaching it.[1]

These words, which Michel Foucault pronounces in 1983 to explain the "strange case
of nonpenetration"[2] between the Frankfurt School and French contemporary
philosophy, nicely capture the challenge I would like to take up in the present work.[3]
Whereas the bulk of the existing commentaries draws general comparisons between
Foucault and the Frankfurt School[4], here my goal will be to provide a specific
investigation of what has been paradoxically labelled the "disjunctive conjunction"[5]
that links Foucault's critical philosophy with Theodor Adorno's social theory. In
particular, the distinctive contribution of my dissertation consists in the elaboration of

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[1] Foucault, "Structuralism and Post-structuralism", p. 441.

[2] Ibid., p. 440.

[3] Recalling the years of his philosophical education, Foucault claims: "Critical Theory was hardly known in France, and the Frankfurt School was practically unheard of. This, by the way, raises a minor historical problem that fascinates me, and I have not been able to resolve at all. It is common knowledge that many representatives of the Frankfurt School came to Paris in 1935, seeking refuge, and left very hastily, sickened presumably – some even said as much – but saddened anyhow not to have found more of an echo. Then came 1940, but they had already left for England and the U.S. where they were actually much better received. The understanding that might have been established between the Frankfurt School and French philosophical thought – by way of the history of science and, therefore, the question of the history of rationality – never occurred. And when I was a student, I can assure you that I never once heard the name of the Frankfurt School mentioned by any of my professors" (Ibid.). Foucault's report might be slightly exaggerated. As far as Adorno is concerned, he sojourned regularly in Paris since 1930, where his friend Walter Benjamin lived as an exile. In Paris, Adorno gave three talks at the Sorbonne in 1958, and three others at the Collège de France in 1961. All these conferences were dedicated to the critical discussion of Heidegger's philosophy, or better of the impasses marking its reception in the work of three major authors of the so-called French Heideggerian Left, who were close – in a certain way – to the Frankfurt School: Lucien Goldmann, Henri Lefebvre, and Kostas Axelos. It is not recounted whether Foucault too attended Adorno's talks. In any case, due to the negative reactions of the French audience, an authentic philosophical debate between Adorno and the French Heideggerian Left never took place, which contributed to the nonpenetration of his thought in France. On the content of Adorno's talks see Scholz, "Tout seul dans le pays de l'heideggérianisme. Adorno conférencier au Collège de France".

[4] See Dews, *Logics of Disintegration*, pp. 176–242; Hoy, "Foucault and Critical Theory"; Hoy, "Power, Repression, Progress"; Hoy and McCarthy, *Critical Theory*; Ingram, "Foucault and the Frankfurt School"; McCarthy, "The Critique of Impure Reason"; Smart, *Foucault, Marxism, and Critique*, pp. 122–36; White, "Foucault's Challenge to Critical Theory".

[5] Riccio and Vaccaro, *Adorno e Foucault. Congiunzione Disgiuntiva*.

a detailed assessment of both the explanatory value and reconstructive potential of their common attempt at developing a critico-theoretical account of modern Western society that would emphasize the concrete possibilities of its radical transformation in the service of a renewal of the emancipatory project marking Enlightenment modernity, while at the same time examining the often-neglected large compatibility between their respective approaches. From the outset, however, I should be clear that it is not a matter of tracing either Foucauldian anticipations in Adorno's work or Adornian legacies in Foucault according to a philological hermeneutics. Rather, my point is to compare their reflections where they crisscross some crucial zones, in order to articulate the conditions of a possible dialogue that foreshadows, we will see, an agreement in their intentions. The remarkable differences separating their biographic and cultural backgrounds could discourage such an enterprise.[6] If one excludes their upper-middle-class bourgeois families and the experience of Nazi fascism, Adorno's and Foucault's lives have almost nothing in common: on the one hand, we have the Mittel-European atmosphere, Nazism and the ordeal of the exile, the Second World War, and the return in a divided country responsible for the genocide of the European Jews; on the other, we find the fervent environment of postwar France, the numerous foreign associations, the nascent gay culture, and the direct participation in social and political activities. Likewise, their cultural training and interests are considerably different. Philosophy and aesthetics are Adorno's main fields of inquiry: on the one hand, his thought is characterized by the continuous confrontation with the classics of Western philosophy, the controversial relationship with Hegel and Marx, and his interest in empirical disciplines such as sociology and psychology tackled from a highly theoretical perspective. On the other, his high

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[6] There are several biographies of the life of both Adorno and Foucault. The most accurate and uncontroversial ones are D. Eribon, *Michel Foucault* and S. Müller-Doohm, *Adorno: A Biography*.

praise for art as a living experience (Adorno was a composer himself) is the source of a tormented engagement with the otherwise vituperated mass-media and of his strong critique of the social role of music, literature, and visual arts. Plunging into the material archives of history, instead, Foucault's works are the result of the study of a dispersed array of materials: the birth of particular institutions and specific areas of knowledge, the French epistemological currents of the 20th century, the Annales School, the philosophical traditions of phenomenology and structuralism together with the literary aesthetics of the surrealist movement, thinkers like Descartes, Marx, Nietzsche, Weber, Heidegger preferably addressed in an oblique way, and last but not least his "Greco-Latin 'trip'"[7] as he called his unfinished late reflections on ancient ethics and the history of sexuality. But commentators have pointed out a further apparent discrepancy between Adorno and Foucault, which concerns their respective methodological approaches.[8] Persuaded that modern thought forms distort reality, Adorno elaborates a modality of critique characterized by the movement of negative dialectics. Such an exercise of thought analyses a recurrent set of theoretical nodes through a concentric series of reversals geared to reveal the contradictory aspects of the totally administered society of late capitalism, thus opening up crevices where praxis could intervene to transform our reified experience with a view to a reconciled future.[9] To the contrary, rejecting the dialectical logic of contradictions[10], Foucault's archaeo-genealogical investigations represent the evolution of a critical style of thinking that "advances sideways"[11] through an open-ended sequence of explorative displacements and assemblages, which aim to destabilize the supposedly universal

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[7] Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*, p. 2.
[8] See, for example, Vaccaro, "Adorno e Foucault. Pensare di Soglia", pp. 15–8.
[9] See Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 247.
[10] See, for instance, Foucault, "*Theatrum Philosophicum*", p. 359.
[11] Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 78.

and necessary limits of our present practices in order to show their historical contingency and thereby free alternative possibilities of self-fashioning.

Despite all these points of divergence – which have often led commentators to hastily speak about an essential incompatibility between their perspectives –, however, it is my contention that there are both textual and theoretical reasons that lend plausibility to my comparative project. I shall first consider the textual reasons. Although Adorno and Foucault never addressed each other's work, and Foucault had a very limited knowledge of Adorno, the publication of Foucault's essays and interviews in *Dits et Écrits* as well as of his lectures at the Collège de France has brought to light a number of references to the Frankfurt School generally. Consider, for example, the following passage:

> The representatives of the Frankfurt School have tried, earlier than I, to say things I have been trying to say for years. This even explains a certain irritation that some people had expressed on seeing that people in France were doing things that were, if not identical, then at least very similar; indeed, a concern for correctness and theoretical productivity would have required that the Frankfurt School be studied much more seriously. For my part, I think that the philosophers of that school raised problems we're still labouring over today – in particular, that of the effects of power in their relation to a rationality that was defined historically and geographically, in the West, from the sixteenth century onward. The West wouldn't have been able to achieve the economic and cultural results that characterize it without the exercise of that particular form of rationality. And, in fact, how can that rationality be separated from the mechanisms, procedures, techniques, and effects of power that accompany it and for which we express our distaste by describing them as the typical form of oppression of capitalist societies – and perhaps socialist societies as well? Couldn't it be concluded that the Enlightenment's promise of attaining freedom through the exercise of reason has been turned upside down, resulting

in a domination by reason itself, which increasingly usurps the place of freedom?[12]

In the same interview from which the passage just quoted is extrapolated, Foucault goes even so far as to recognize his debt to the first generation of the Frankfurt School, who before him engaged in the examination of the insidious entanglement between power mechanisms and modern rationality:

> When I acknowledge the merits of the Frankfurt School philosophers, I do so with the bad conscience of someone who should have read them long before, who should have understood them much earlier. Had I read these works, there are many things I wouldn't have needed to say, and I would have avoided some mistakes. Perhaps, if I had known the philosophers of that school when I was young, I would have been so captivated by them that I wouldn't have done anything else but comment on them. One doesn't know whether to be glad or sorry about these retrospective influences, these people one discovers after the age when one would have been ready to come under their influence.[13]

The attestation is neither isolated nor casual – especially in the work of an author like Foucault who was extremely unwilling to pay rhetoric tributes. Elsewhere, discussing the *Aufklärung* as the epoch when for the first time reason was questioned not only as to its powers and rights but also to its historical conditions of exercise and current status with respect to its present reality, Foucault draws a unexpected parallel between the Frankfurt School and the tradition of French epistemology, whose influence played a decisive role in the development of his own thought:

> If one had to look outside France for something corresponding to the work of Koyré, Bachelard, Cavaillès, and Canguilhem, it would be in the vicinity of the Frankfurt

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[12] Foucault, "Interview with Michel Foucault", p. 273, translation amended.
[13] Ibid., p. 274.

School, no doubt, that one would find it. And yet the styles are very different, as are the methods and the areas treated. But both groups ultimately raise the same kind of questions […] These are the questions that must be addressed to a rationality that aspires to the universal while developing within contingency, that asserts its unity and yet proceeds only through partial modifications, that validates itself by its own supremacy but that cannot be dissociated in its history from the inertias, the dullnesses, or the coercions that subjugate it. In the history of the sciences in France, as in German Critical Theory, what is to be examined, basically, is a reason whose structural autonomy carries the history of dogmatisms and despotisms along with it.[14]

But if this textual evidence already provides a preliminary corroboration of our research hypothesis about the presence of subterranean connections between their philosophical trajectories, it is in another piece dedicated to the theme of the Enlightenment that the proximity between Foucault and Adorno comes most clearly to the fore.[15] The piece is included in the opening lesson of Foucault's 1983 course at the Collège de France, where he reviews Kant's answer to the question *Was ist Aufklärung?* and his text on the French Revolution from *The Contest of the Faculties*. Allow me to quote at full length:

Let's say that in his major critical *œuvre* – that of the three Critiques and above all the first Critique – Kant set out and founded that tradition of critical philosophy which posed the question of the conditions of possibility of a true knowledge. And we can say that a whole part of modern philosophy since the nineteenth century presented itself and developed from this as the analytic of truth. This is the form of philosophy that you now find in the form of, say, Anglo-Saxon analytical philosophy. But within modern and contemporary philosophy there is another type of question, of critical questioning whose

[14] Foucault, "Life: Experience and Science", p. 469.
[15] For other texts where Foucault refers to the Frankfurt School, see Foucault "'*Omnes et Singulatim*'"; Foucault "The Political Technology of Individuals"; Foucault, "The Subject and Power"; Foucault, "What is Critique?"; Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?".

birth we see precisely in the question of *Aufklärung* or in Kant's text on the Revolution. This other critical tradition does not pose the question of the conditions of possibility of a true knowledge; it asks the question: *What is present reality? What is the present field of our experiences? What is the present field of possible experiences?* Here it is not a question of the analytic of truth but involves what could be called an *ontology of the present*, of present reality, an *ontology of modernity*, an *ontology of ourselve*s. It seems to me that the philosophical choice confronting us today is the following. We have to opt either for a critical philosophy which appears as an analytical philosophy of truth in general, or for a critical thought which takes the form of an ontology of ourselves, of present reality. It is this latter form of philosophy which, from Hegel to the Frankfurt School, passing through Nietzsche, Max Weber and so on, has founded a form of reflection to which, of course, I link myself insofar as I can.[16]

To put it otherwise, whereas Kant's first Critique inaugurates that line of thinking which sets itself the objective of investigating the supposed *a priori* conditions of possibility for true knowledge, for Foucault Kant's essays on the Enlightenment and the French Revolution pose for the first time the question of the present as a philosophical event, namely of what in the present has meaning for philosophical reflection. Indeed, Kant addresses the problem of modernity in an entirely new way. The classical culture of the 17th and 18th century formulated this problem in terms of "an authority to be accepted or rejected […] or in the correlative form of a comparative evaluation: are the Ancients superior to the Moderns?".[17] Kant, instead, opts for an alternative take. In these essays, the question of modernity emerges against the background of a "sagittal" relationship between philosophy and its own actuality, whereby critical philosophy presents itself as the problematization of at one and the same time "man's relation to the present, man's historical mode of being, and

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[16] Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, *pp*. 20–1, emphasis added.
[17] Ibid., p. 13.

the constitution of the self as an autonomous subject".[18] On Foucault's view, that lays the ground for a second tradition, whose fundamental concern is the interrogation of the present and its relationship with philosophical practice. It is with this tradition that Foucault aligns not only his own inquiries but also Adorno's work as an exponent of the Frankfurt School.

Now, my claim is that such a declaration of affiliation needs to be taken seriously: despite the differences we have seen above, Foucault's genealogy and Adorno's social theory seem to converge in a similar theoretical project, which Foucault himself calls an "ontology of the actuality".[19] But what does this project look like? In his essay "What is Enlightenment?" – which resumes many of the themes treated in his 1983 lecture –, Foucault defines the ontology of actuality as "a critical ontology of ourselves".[20] The project of the ontology of actuality, then, can be viewed as being part of the long tradition of Western critical thought. As Benhabib argues, the distinctive feature of this tradition is represented by its concern with two mutually complementary dimensions: an "explanatory-diagnostic" one and an "anticipatory-utopian" one.[21] According to the first of these two axes, the ontology of actuality should be understood as a historical ontology, whose task is to bring to light the specific conditions of possibility at the basis of the emergence of the discursive rationalities, regimes of power, and models of subject formation marking our present experience. Drawing on the resources and insights of empirical social sciences like sociology, psychology, and economics, Adorno and Foucault pursue this task by formulating a critical diagnosis of modern Western society, which displaces the subject from its central position within the epistemological and moral universes in

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[18] Foucault, "What is the Enlightenment?", p. 312.
[19] Foucault, "What is Revolution?", p. 95 (this text is a different translation of an extract of Foucault's 1983 lecture at the Collège the France).
[20] Ibid., p. 319.
[21] Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*, p. 226.

order to clarify the power-laden social and historical processes that bears upon its constitution. Adorno's analyses of late capitalist society and Foucault's investigations of modern biopolitical techniques of domination aim to show the role played by systems of knowledge and power mechanisms in shaping the forms of subjectivity we have come to endorse as universal and necessary, thereby revealing the contingent and problematic nature of the ways in which we experience our own lives. In other terms, as Adorno puts it, their analyses meet in the production of an interpretation of contemporary social reality oriented to the

> criticism of phenomena that have been brought to a standstill; it consists in revealing the dynamism stored up in them, so that what appears as second nature can be seen to be history. […] criticism ensures that what has evolved loses its appearance as mere existence and stands revealed as the product of history.[22]

By weaving together first and third person perspectives of our social world, Adorno's and Foucault's methods call into question our normative commitments, cultural patterns of behaviour, political institutions, and social practices so as to enable the acquisition of a critical distance with respect the present, through which they not only expose its dangers and pathologies, but also contribute to change people's ways of perceiving and acting in a "difficult displacement of [their] forms of sensibility and thresholds of tolerance".[23] This brings us to the second axis of their common project. As I shall argue in greater detail below, being reflexively aware of their historical situatedness, Adorno and Foucault elaborate a partisan mode of critical inquiry that examines the past "from the […] interested standpoint of an anticipated future"[24]: the

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[22] Adorno, *History and Freedom*, p. 135.
[23] Foucault, "Questions of Method", p. 234.
[24] McCarthy, "Critique of Impure Reason", p. 438.

ontology of the present, in fact, "is indissociable from a desperate eagerness to imagine it, to imagine it otherwise than it is, and to transform it not by destroying it but by grasping it in what it is".[25] Their historical problematization of the beliefs and practices that have fashioned who we are makes visible lines of fragility within the current forms of captivity, whose disclosure opens up spaces of practical intervention geared to foster a radical change of the present in the direction of a different future. Motivated by the diagnoses of the mutual entanglement between enlightenment rationality and power relations, however, the transformation Adorno and Foucault advocate does not point to an abstract dismissal of our normative commitments as heirs of the Enlightenment but rather to an immanent critique of modernity, whereby Enlightenment could finally "break trough its own limits" and realize its truly emancipatory potential.[26]

Following the double-layered structure of the ontology of actuality just sketched, I shall divide my thesis into five chapters. Chapters 1 and 2 will be devoted to the analysis of the diagnostic axis of Adorno's and Foucault's critical projects. Chapter 1 will start with a review of Adorno's conception of late modern society as a reified totality fully determined by the logic of the capitalist exchange principle. I shall then confront Adorno's account of social domination with Foucault's early analytics of power and illustrate their parallel pictures of the disciplinary mechanisms at the basis of the constitution of modern individuals. The chapter will conclude by assessing their critique of the scientific discourses and ideological procedures that have bolstered such a process. After examining the connection they establish between the development of capitalism and modern biopower, Chapter 2 will analyse Foucault's

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[25] Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?", p. 311.
[26] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 172. This point has been recently reiterated by Amy Allen in *The End of Progress*, chapter 5. In following pages, it will become clear where my innovative contribution vis-à-vis her work lies.

late history of governmentality. This will lead me to compare Foucault's and Adorno's portraits of the political culture of liberalism. Whereas the validity of Adorno's analyses can hardly be extended beyond the fordist regime marking the welfare states in the first half of the 20th century, I shall argue that Foucault's genealogical investigations of German ordoliberalism and American neoliberalism offer us illuminating insights into the flexible and securitarian technologies of contemporary forms of biopolitical government. Chapters 3 to 5 will be concerned with the anticipatory-utopian dimension of Adorno's and Foucault's enterprises. Chapter 3 will be devoted to a largely unprecedented comparison of Adorno's and Foucault's critical approaches. I shall begin by exploring the three modalities of critique Adorno opts for: immanent or speculative criticism, dialectical analysis, and the method of natural history. Secondly, I shall engage in a detailed account of the archaeo-genealogical and experimental axes of Foucault's critical attitude. Finally, despite their different targets and narratives, I shall contend that Adorno's method of natural history and Foucault's genealogy converge in the project of a critical problematization of the present, which aims at modifying their addressees' sensibility and experience not only to show the historical contingency of the present but also to encourage its radical transformation. Contrary to the common view that they lack normative theorizing, Chapter 4 will investigate the normative bases of Adorno's and Foucault's preferred modalities of critique. I shall contrast Adorno's negative account of normativity with Foucault's positive appeal to the idea of freedom as self-transformation, while emphasising their shared attempt at promoting a fuller realization of the emancipatory promises of Enlightenment modernity. Chapter 5 will elaborate a much overdue comparative evaluation of their responses to the ethico-political challenges of the present. To this end, I shall juxtapose Adorno's minimal

ethics of resistance with Foucault's late ethical reflections on the ancient practices of care of the self, which lies at the source of his more ambitious politics of the governed. The chapter will close by proposing a possible way of complementing Foucault's call for creative resistance with Adorno's politics of suffering.

While there have been some parallel investigations of Adorno's and Foucault's views[27], just a few could rely on the materials we now have access to with the publication of many of Adorno's lectures at the University of Frankfurt and all of Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France, not to speak of several other essays and interviews.[28] Furthermore, existing commentaries tend to focus on the explanatory-diagnostic axis of Foucault's and Adorno's projects, thereby failing to offer an adequate comparison of their anticipatory-utopian dimension. My dissertation aims to fill in these gaps by developing a comprehensive appraisal of their respective strategies for social criticism. Accordingly, starting from their shared picture of the relation between enlightenment rationality and modern technologies of power, I shall explore the major divergences in their accounts of both the historical conditions at the root of the dangers and ills marking Western society and of the potential actions we could undertake in order to chart the way towards a brighter future. In this sense, my dissertation has a polemic vein too: if Adorno's and Foucault's works can be said to constitute two highly influential alternatives to what has been called the neo-Idealist

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[27] See especially Honneth, *The Critique of Power* and Honneth, "Foucault and Adorno: Two Forms of the Critique of Modernity". See also the essays contained in Riccio and Vaccaro, *Adorno e Foucault. Congiuntiva Disgiuntiva*.

[28] See Cook's four articles "Really Existing Socialization: Socialization and Socialism in Adorno and Foucault", "Adorno, Foucault and Critique", "Foucault and Adorno on Power and Exchange", and "Notes on Individuation in Adorno and Foucault" (I shall present my disagreements with Cook in the main text below. Here, it will be sufficient to underline that in all of these articles Cook dedicates much more space to the discussion of the explanatory-diagnostic axis of Adorno's and Foucault's critical projects than to the examination of their anticipatory-utopian dimension. Indeed, Cook never offers a detailed comparison of their critical approaches nor of their ethics of resistance). See also Allen, *The End of Progress*, chapter 5 (Allen's main goal is to the analyse Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and Foucault's *History of Madness* in search of an alternative to the Hegelian and Kantian accounts of the relationship between normativity and history proposed by Habermas, Honneth, and Forst. As a result of this limited scope, Allen leaves both Adorno's and Foucault's critiques of modernity and ethical positions largely unexamined).

turn of much of contemporary critical theory with its separation of moral and empirical claims from the material, power-laden matrix of social life[29], I shall finally argue that Foucault offers us a better toolbox not only to understand who we are, but also to imagine ourselves otherwise. Far from being a mere scholarly exercise geared to reconstruct a possible dialogue between the two sides of the Rhine, therefore, this dissertation is meant to provide a modest contribution to a critical thought that would like to "take aim at the heart of the present".[30]

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[29] See Thompson, *The Domestication of Critical Theory*. More on this point in the conclusive chapter.
[30] This beautiful expression is included in the title of the eulogy Habermas wrote in memory of Foucault. See Habermas, "Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present: On Foucault's Lecture on Kant's *What is Enlightenment?*".

Chapter 1
Society

In this chapter, I shall broach a first comparison of Adorno's and Foucault's respective pictures of contemporary society, focusing on the entanglement between reason and power they see as the hallmark of Enlightenment modernity. The chapter will be divided into three sections. Section 1 will examine Adorno's antagonistic conception of late modern society as an ideological totality fully determined by the fetish abstraction of the capitalist exchange principle, whose universal expansion lies at the root of the reification of all aspects of human life. In Section 2, then, I shall juxtapose Adorno's account of social domination with Foucault's early genealogical analytics of modern power. After illustrating the main features of Foucault's theory of domination, I shall initially contrast his pluralist, bottom-up, and local conception of power relations against Adorno's economistic, top-down, and monist approach. Despite this divergence, however, I shall maintain that both Foucault and Adorno insist on the productive nature of techniques of domination, as it is testified by their complementary analyses of the disciplinary fabrication of individuals in modern societies. Finally, Section 3 will be devoted to the appraisal of what Adorno and Foucault consider as reason's "impurity", showing how their understanding of rationality informs their critique of the socio-cultural structures weighting on modern individuals.

1. Adorno on the Exchange Society

Notoriously, the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* opens with the following striking claim: "Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always

aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters. Yet the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity".[1] These lines have often been read as confirming the view that Adorno provides us with a negative *Verfallsgeschichte* culminating in the totalitarianisms of the 20th century. According to this interpretation, Horkheimer and Adorno associate the genesis of social reification not with the capitalist extension of the commodity-form to the entire social body, but rather with a more general process of rationalization geared to ensure the domination of human beings over external and inner nature for the purposes of self-preservation. In the wake of Weber, then, for Horkheimer and Adorno enlightenment paradoxically figures both as the positive capacity of human beings for reflective emancipation and as a regressive, amoral, and ultimately self-destructive will of mastery and control:

> The very concept of [enlightenment] thinking, no less than the concrete historical forms,
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> the institutions of society with which it is intertwined, already contains the germ of the
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> regression which is taking place everywhere today.[2]

However, the relationship between enlightenment rationality and domination cannot be characterized only in terms of a "conceptual *aporia*" as in this passage. If it were so, Habermas would be right to maintain that "there is *no way out*"[3]: reason *per se* would be reduced to domination, which entails a necessary negative endpoint of the historical development. *Pace* Habermas, Horkheimer and Adorno reject such a thesis, arguing against the possibility to acquire a full knowledge of any final *telos* of history

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[1] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 1.
[2] Ibid., p. xvi.
[3] Habermas *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, p. 128.

(whether negative or positive). As Allen explains[4], instead, what the term "germ" suggests is that for Horkheimer and Adorno the paradox of rationalization is both conceptual *and* historically contingent: its ambivalence points to a potential perversion of enlightenment reason, whose pathological effects are the result of the convergence in European modernity of a specific series of events which have brought reason's regressive potential to actualization. To put it in Adorno's words,

> the dialectic of Enlightenment is a matter of such profound importance in history, so much so that we must conclude […] that, *in the historical form in which we encounter it to this day*, reason is both reason *and* unreason in one.[5]

The point, then, is to complement Allen's account by providing a detailed analysis of those processes Adorno sees at the root of the distortion of enlightenment rationality. To this end, I shall first discuss the primacy Adorno assigns to the capitalist economy in modern welfare states and explain the process of "real abstraction" through which society comes to dominate its individual members.

On Adorno's view, with the emergence of the welfare state in the early 20th century the concentration of capital has "acquired such a weight of its own that capital presents itself […] as the expression of society as a whole".[6] This predominance of the capitalist economy in late mass societies takes the shape of "the old fetish character of the commodity, according to which relations between men are reflected back to them as relations between things".[7] Indeed, following Marx, Adorno holds that "behind the reduction of men to agents and bearers of exchange value lies the

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[4] See Allen, *The End of Progress*, pp. 231–34.
[5] Adorno, *History and Freedom*, p. 45, emphasis added.
[6] Adorno, "Reflections on Class Theory", p. 99, translation amended.
[7] Ibid., p. 99.

domination of men over men"[8]. This means that the abstract and anonymous law of value regulating capitalism is the principle of modern society, which turns all men into mere "functions of their own production-apparatus".[9] From my perspective, this idea of the capitalist social reality as the "totality of exchange society" plays a crucial role in Adorno's account of social domination, but so far it has received insufficient attention in the existing secondary literature.[10] Indeed, there are two common readings of Adorno's theory of social domination[11]: according to the first one, the latter would correspond to Lukács' theory of reification, which synthetizes Marx's theory of commodity fetishism with Weber's picture of modernity as a process of disenchanted rationalization.[12] According to the second reading, instead, Adorno's theory of social domination is equivalent with his own theory of reification, whose major distinctive feature consists in the fact that Adorno no longer ties reification to the universalization of the commodity-form as it is still in Lukács', but rather considers reification as a generalized process co-extensive with the entire course of Western civilisation.[13] By conflating his notion of fetishism and reification, however,

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[8] Adorno, "Society", pp. 148–49.

[9] Adorno, "Late Capitalism or Industrial Society?", p. 4.

[10] See, for instance, Postone, "Critique, State, and Economy", in which Adorno is not even addressed. See also Bernstein "Negative Dialectic as Fate", where Bernstein claims that Adorno rejects Marxist theory for a Weberian and Freudian account of modernity (p. 26). Even Jarvis, in his essay on Adorno and Marx, fails to appreciate the relevance of the exchange principle for Adorno's philosophy (see Jarvis, "Adorno, Marx, Materialism"). For a compelling exception see Bellofiore and Riva, "The Neue Marx-Lektüre".

[11] A third, less common reading is that proposed by the so-called school of Open Marxism. An adequate analysis of it would require a long explanation of the characteristics of this project. Within the space constraints that are granted me here, I can only refer the reader to the essays contained in Hollway, Matamoros, Tischler, *Negativity and Revolution*.

[12] For two examples of this kind of reading see Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School* and Cook, *The Culture Industry Revisited*. Such a reading has the merit to stress Lukács' and Adorno's shared appeal to Weber and Marx in the elaboration of their respective accounts of social domination. Nonetheless, it neglects not only their points of divergence, but also the distinction between fetishism and reification in Adorno's work. On the differences between Lukács and Adorno see Rose, *The Melancholy Science*, pp. 40–42 and Testa, "*Corpus*. Reificazione e anamnesi della natura nella *Dialettica dell'Illuminismo*".

[13] This reading was pioneered by Rose in *The Melancholy Science*. Denying erroneously that Marx has a theory of reification, here Rose argues that Marx's theory is a theory of commodity fetishism, while Lukács' and Adorno's are theories of reification. Rose, though, never gives any rationale for such an unusual attribution. That leads to her conflation of Adorno's theory of fetishism with his theory of reification, where the latter is reckoned to be equivalent to his account of social domination (see

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both these readings lack an adequate explanation of Adorno's theory of exchange abstraction as the ground of his account of social domination, whereby they fail to clarify how and why for him reification has assumed its historically specific, most universal form under late capitalism.[14] As a result, here I shall start by examining Adorno's account of the fetishism of the exchange abstraction, which will provide the necessary basis for a correct understanding of the properties he ascribes to domination within contemporary society.

Adorno's social philosophy should be regarded as a dialectical theory of the constitution of society as a subjective-objective reality: society is subjective because it is man-made, but at the same time society is also objective since it reproduces itself as a supra-individual, independent structure which subjugates its own creators. Although it realizes itself through the action of social agents, society is marked by a moment of autonomization, whose genesis is to be traced back to the law of accumulation of capital. In other terms, since "society […] is […] no longer intelligible, [but] only the law of [its] becoming independent is intelligible" (i.e. the law of value)[15], the aim of Adorno's social theory is to show how the capitalist mode of production has developed into an all-powerful, ideological system, i.e. into a *second nature* whose legality "comes into force without men being conscious of it".[16] To this end, it is necessary to investigate society as a dialectical totality held together by a synthetic principle, which connects each and every social aspect. For Adorno, in modern capitalist society this function is performed by the principle of exchange

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especially ibid., p. 46). For other two influential works that largely follow Rose see Cook, *Adorno, Habermas and the Search for a Rational Society* and Jay, *Adorno*.

[14] See Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 130.

[15] Adorno *et al.*, *The Positive Dispute in German Sociology*, p. 15.

[16] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 300.

itself.[17] As "the socio-transcendental *a priori*"[18] of modern society, exchange is the mediating principle that ensures the cohesion and reproduction of the social totality through a process of "real abstraction"[19], according to which all material and symbolic activities are shaped by the universal and invisible predominance of value. As Adorno repeatedly notes, in fact, what defines the essential core of the capitalist law of value is *equivalence*: with the abstraction of productive labour into quantifiable units of value, capitalism excludes the use-value of goods and defines them only in terms of the average socially necessary labour-time required for their production, i.e. in terms of their exchange-value.[20] Capitalism transforms unequal and non-identical things into commensurable commodities that are to be exchanged in the attempt to maximize surplus-value:

> It is characteristic of commodity economy [*Warenwirtschaft*] that what marks exchange – i.e. that it is a relation between human beings – disappears and presents itself as if it were a quality of the things themselves that are to be exchanged. What is fetishized is not exchange, but rather the commodity. That which is an ossified social relation within commodities is taken as if it were a natural quality, a being-in-itself of things. It is not exchange which is illusionary, because exchange really takes place. The illusion in the process of exchange lies in the concept of surplus-value.[21]

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[17] "What really makes society a social entity, what constitutes it both conceptually and in reality, is the relationship of exchange, which binds together virtually all the people participating in this kind of society" (Adorno, *Introduction to Sociology*, p. 31)

[18] Žižek, *The Parallax View*, p. 56.

[19] See Adorno, *Introduction to Sociology*, pp. 31–2. On the concept of "real abstraction" see Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour*. In a letter to Sohn-Rethel dated 17th November 1936, Adorno admits that Sohn-Rethel's interpretation of the Marxian notion of "real abstraction" has been the most important "intellectual shock" of his life (See Sohn-Rethel and Adorno, *Briefwechsel 1936–69*, p. 32).

[20] "What makes commodities exchangeable is the unity of socially necessary abstract labour time [*Arbeitszeit*]. Abstract labour, because through a reduction to unity one abstracts from use value, from needs" (Adorno, "Über Marx und die Grundbegriffe der soziologischen Theorie", p. 507).

[21] Ibid., pp. 507–8, my translation.

To state it otherwise, Adorno conceives of fetishism as the boundless process of abstraction through which every object in capitalism appears to be schematized in a pre-determined way, namely as an exchangeable commodity with autonomous and objective properties. Consequently, for Adorno, Marx's insights into commodity fetishism represent the key to disclose the autonomous form of social domination. Exchange has a dialectical nature, according to which "on the one hand, commodity fetishism is mere semblance [*Schein*] and on the other […] it is ultimate reality [*äußerste Realität*]".[22] It is illusionary appearance because, far from being a natural property of things, value derives from the relations of production in which individuals are embedded. This means that the logic of exchange operates by ideologically concealing its rule from consciousness.[23] Indeed, as an objective process, ideology is "necessary since […] society fears nothing more than to be called by name".[24] Following Hegel's *Logic*, therefore, Adorno holds that the essence of social reality (i.e. its subservience to the exchange principle) cannot but give rise to a deceptive appearance, without which essence would not count as essence any more[25]: under the spell of commodity fetishism social reality presents itself as the creation of free individuals, while according to the essential structure of the same reality these individuals are utterly conditioned by the apparently natural and unchangeable laws of capital.[26] At the same time, though, commodity fetishism is also "a conceptuality that holds sway in reality"[27], because it tells how the total synthesis of exchange leads

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[22] Ibid., p. 508, my translation.
[23] Adorno, "Sociology and Empirical Research", p. 80.
[24] Ibid., p. 76.
[25] I shall return on Adorno's exposition of the dialectic between essence and appearance in Chapter 3. To my knowledge, the only secondary text dealing with this dialectic is Beaza, *Contradiction, Critique, and Dialectic in Adorno*, especially chapter 4. Although she rightly points to the total determination of society by the principle of exchange, however, Baeza fails to provide a fully-fledged account of *how* this dialectic emerges from the mechanism of real abstraction of the exchange principle itself.
[26] Adorno, *Introduction to Sociology*, p. 137.
[27] Adorno, "Sociology and Empirical Research", p. 80. See also Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 178.

individuals into a system of alienated relations, whose imperative is defined by the profit-seeking compulsion of capitalism itself. Indeed, whereas it initially defined the most advanced natural-historical tool humanity has endowed itself with in order to cope with the material scarcity and dangers threatening its own drive for self-preservation[28], today's capitalism acquires a life of its own that reverses the means-ends relationship, whereby operating "over their heads and through their heads"[29] capitalism turns human beings' self-preservation into its autonomous tendency to produce more and more commodities as vehicles for profit.[30]

According to Adorno, therefore, domination in late capitalist societies takes the shape of a pervasive colonization of all social spheres by the logic of the exchange principle, whose abstraction is "*a priori* allied with the domination of […] society over its captive membership".[31] In order to fully appreciate what is at stake here, it is worth examining Adorno's position vis-à-vis what has long been considered as its main source, namely Friedrich Pollock's analysis of the centralized economy marking "state capitalism" in the first half of the 20th century. From Pollock's perspective, the command and mixed economies of 1920s and 1930s – instantiated respectively by the Third Reich and by the New Deal in the US – put an end to the previous liberal phase of capitalist development. In these economies, the profit motive is replaced by the power motive through the subordination of both production and distribution to state control.[32] By exercising a strict vigilance over the fluctuations of prices and wages, then, centralized planning takes the place once occupied by the competitive market in order to regulate social consumption, thus successfully forestalling the ruinous

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[28] See Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 146.
[29] Ibid., p. 304, text amended.
[30] "Only when the process that begins with the metamorphosis of labour-power into a commodity has permeated men through and through and objectified each of their impulses as formally commensurable variations of the exchange relationship, is it possible for life to reproduce itself under the prevailing relations of production" (Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 229).
[31] Adorno *et al.*, *The Positive Dispute in German Sociology*, p. 14.
[32] Pollock, "State Capitalism", p. 201.

outgrowths (read basically according to an under-consumptionist framework) expected by Marxist theory from the contradictions inherent to the capitalist mode of production.[33] While several commentators have pointed to Adorno's uncritical reliance on Pollock's investigations[34], I agree with Cook that his reception of Pollock's work – mediated through Adorno's Marxist position – is far more nuanced[35]. Indeed, despite sharing Pollock's portrait of late modern societies as driven towards political domination, Adorno insists that "the economic process continues to perpetuate domination over human beings", since the tendential increase of the power motif hangs upon specific economic dynamics.[36] Adorno's belief in the primacy of capitalist economy is supported by his reflections on the persistent division between classes in contemporary society. Although he admits that the sense of class belonging has flagged, he argues that "the division of society into exploiters and exploited" – albeit less and less visible – "not only continues unabated but is increasing in coercion and solidity".[37] Late capitalism has changed class composition: with the emergence of state administered capitalism and corporate planning, the bourgeois figure of the independent entrepreneur that still characterized the 19th century competition-driven phase of capitalism is relegated by large monopolies into a new extended class, which comprises both workers and a weakened middle class. Nonetheless, "society remains class society", because "the difference between classes grows objectively with the increasing concentration of capital".[38] If "contemporary society is above all an industrial society according to the level of its productive

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[33] Ibid.

[34] See Scheuerman *Between the Norm and the Exception*, p. 124 and Parkhurst, "Adorno and the Practice of Theory", p. 55.

[35] Cook, "Adorno on Late Capitalism". See also Kellner, *Critical Theory, Marxism and Modernity*, 62–3.

[36] Adorno, "Late Capitalism or Industrial Society?", p. 4,

[37] Adorno, "Reflections on Class Theory", p. 97. See also p. 95.

[38] Adorno, "Society", pp. 149–50.

forces"[39], the relations of production through which these forces are mediated prove the pernicious primacy of the capitalist economy, whereby "now as much as ever the [societal] process produces and reproduces a class structure"[40]. As a result, Adorno remains persuaded that "profit comes first in mass society"[41]. In this sense, far from representing the sphere in which individuals as citizens unite in order to realize the good organization of society as a whole, the state subordinates its power to the exigencies of the economic system.[42] More specifically, mitigating social conflicts and forestalling capitalism's crisis-ridden tendencies, state intervention is the fundamental tool ensuring the resilience of the economic system as well as its enduring dominance.[43] Supported by police and public institutions, state power concurs with the centralized capitalist production to the arrangement of society as a totalitarian economic whole, whose alien and constraining power reduces individuals to powerless "objects of administration" for monopolistic clusters and their supporting state apparatuses.[44]

Adorno describes such a state of affairs as "a free floating angst", "fate" or "doom": individuals are bound to conform to the unpredictable dynamics of the economic organization of society, because "the refusal to play the game arouses suspicions and exposes the offenders to the vengeance of society".[45] The extension of the abstract power of the capitalist exchange principle is so far-reaching that individuals are utterly integrated into the negative universality of the social totality, whereby they are

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[39] Adorno, "Late Capitalism or Industrial Society?", p. 5.
[40] Ibid., p. 4, translation amended.
[41] Adorno, "Society", p. 148.
[42] "State power has shed even the appearance of independence from particular interests in profit; always in their service […], it now also places itself there ideologically" (Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 53).
[43] Adorno, "Late Capitalism or Industrial Society?", p. 9. In this sense, for instance, Adorno refers to war economy as the privileged solution to the capitalist problem of over-production (see Ibid., p. 8).
[44] Ibid., p. 7.
[45] Adorno, "Sociology and Psychology (Part I)", p. 71.

turned into just "character masks"[46] of a commodified world in which exchange value has become the measure of all aspects of human activity.[47] This process is particularly evident in the two ever-growing spheres of production and consumption. Criticizing the liberal idea of civil society as a sphere of abstractly equal persons that are entitled to some negative rights guaranteeing the egoistic pursuit of their own interests, Adorno's Marxist account of the dimension of social production points to the exploitative nature of capitalist economy, according to which its ideal of a fair and just exchange ideologically conceals the violence intrinsic in the technological process of capitalist accumulation as well as in the power imbalance between the workers and the owners of the means of production.[48] Notwithstanding the antagonistic and unfair relations marking the sphere of production, however, for Adorno there is no simple division between exploited and exploiters. Rather, even though they administer capitalism, monopolists and their hangers-on are themselves cogs of its all-encompassing structure – a structure that in its anonymous domination he sees perfectly described by Nietzsche's expression "all herd and no shepherd".[49] Nietzsche's metaphor can serve well also Adorno's picture of the realm of consumption. Here the age, sex, needs, preferences, and social affiliations of consumers provide advertisers and corporations with the statistical data necessary to devise new market strategies geared to incite individuals to "behave […] in accordance with their previously determined and indexed level, and choose the

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[46] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics,* p. 311.

[47] See Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 310.

[48] Again, here Adorno gives a traditional Marxian account: indeed, the working class depends on the capitalist class for its own subsistence, which induces the worker to accept more easily the conditions of employment imposed by the capitalist himself. Moreover, the formally equal exchange of labour power for wages hides the unequal nature of the transaction: whereas the worker receives the means of its own survival in exchange for his labour power, the capitalist gains in exchange for wages new value, for which the worker is not paid.

[49] Adorno, "Late Capitalism or Industrial Society?", p. 4.

category of mass product turned out for their type"[50], thereby fostering their consumerist incorporation. Accordingly, emphasizing its privatistic features, Adorno criticizes bourgeois individualism for ideologically blurring any critical insight into the levelling and homogenizing pressure to which late capitalist society exposes individuals' needs and instincts as well as desires, thoughts and behaviours.[51] However, the influence of the exchange principle is not limited to the domains of production and consumption, but rather extends its grip onto the spheres of private and interpersonal relations. "Essentially defined […] by their own 'self-interest'"[52], individuals measure the worth of their relationships just in light of their investible aspects, thus loosing the possibility to relate to each other in a spontaneous and non-mediated way.[53] In accordance with the capitalist division of labour, then, social life is reduced to the impoverished interplay of abstractly commensurable values, which reveals the essential affinity of the objective force of exchange with what Adorno calls the "rule of equivalence", namely the fact that each individual becomes replaceable with any other regardless of their particularity.[54] To state it otherwise, by effacing individuals' qualitative differences, the identificatory rationality of the universal exchange principle excludes whatever does not comply with its administering rule.[55] The result is that individuals become self-alienated and estranged from one another, whereby society turns into a "solitary mass" [*einsame Masse*] of isolated existences "separated from each other by an unbridgeable

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[50] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. J. Cumming, p. 123, translation amended.
[51] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 312.
[52] Geuss, *Outside Ethics*, p. 122.
[53] See Adorno, "Sociology and Psychology (Part I)", p. 74.
[54] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 4.
[55] Ibid., p. 172. I shall return in detail on Adorno's account of modern rationality in section 3 of this chapter.

chasm".[56] In fact, alienation occurs precisely because the mechanisms of capitalist production call individuals to shape their identity as replaceable "appendages of the machinery"[57], as empty monads deprived of the means for their own self-determination and unable to interact with one another as well as with the world around them:

> The more heavily the process of self-preservation is based on the bourgeois division of labour, the more it enforces the self-alienation of individuals, who must mould themselves to the technical apparatus body and soul.[58]

Hence, for Adorno, our modern social world is marked by a fundamental "antagonism", according to which the logic of the exchange principle dominates individuals by imposing upon "the whole world the obligation to become identical, to become total".[59] As Cook notes[60], this does not mean that Adorno denies the existence of other forms of power, like the political domination modern state institutions exercise over individuals. Nevertheless, since the state is just the major arm of late capitalism, Adorno offers only scant and underdeveloped remarks on political domination. In particular, he makes reference to two major elements: the formal egalitarianism of the law and the levelling procedures of bureaucracy. As far as law is concerned, in *Negative Dialectics* he claims that "law is the primal phenomenon of irrational rationality. In law the formal principle of equivalence becomes the norm; everyone is treated alike", while persisting inequalities are

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[56] Adorno, "Revidierte Psychoanalyse", p. 36, my translation. Later Adorno calls the appropriateness of the notion of alienation into question, since it seems to hint at the idea of a romanticist return to a pre-capitalist state in which man was a being-in-itself (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 216). Nonetheless, throughout his philosophical enterprise, Adorno holds on to the conception of individuals as alienated from and dominated by the very same objects they themselves have created.
[57] Adorno, "Late Capitalism or Industrial Society?", p. 5, translation amended.
[58] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 23.
[59] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 146.
[60] Cook, *Adorno, Habermas and the Search for a Rational Society*, p. 28.

concealed.[61] Simultaneously, despite his faith in the potential of a democratic form of government, Adorno warns us of the authoritarian risks it runs against: "to apply the idea of democracy in a merely formalistic way, […] without consideration of the *content* of democratic decisions, may lead to complete perversion of democracy itself".[62] On the other hand, in his lecture "Individuum und Organisation", Adorno points to the abstract procedures employed in the bureaucratic administration of society. These procedures "deal with every case automatically and 'without consideration for the person'"[63]: even if they apparently ensure an "element of justice" insofar as they contrast privilege and arbitrariness, the same procedures contribute to the ever-increasing apathy modern individuals experience with regard to the state, whereby what should guarantee their social security and their freedom becomes one of the fundamental sources of their alienation.[64]

In sum, Adorno views society as a capitalist totality that is both dynamic and functional at the same time. On the one hand, his concept of society is dynamic because it describes the distorted rationalization of the modern social world and the inexorable colonization of its central institutions by the autonomous, insidious mechanisms of capitalist exchange, whereby individuals have become nothing more than their "incapacitated products".[65] On the other, the concept is functional since it points to the socio-economic functions one must take on in order to survive: in the current arrangement, "the form of the total system requires every one to respect the law of exchange if he does not wish to be destroyed, irrespective of whether profit is

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[61] "This bound, ideological in itself, turns into real violence through the sanctions of the law as the socially controlling authority, particularly in the administered world" (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 309, translation amended)
[62] Adorno, *Vermischte Schriften I*, p. 268.
[63] Adorno, "Individuum und Organisation", p. 447, my translation.
[64] See Adorno, *Vermischte Schriften I*, pp. 287–92.
[65] Adorno, "Society", p. 144.

his subjective motivation or not".[66] Such a picture, however, is marred by at least three crucial problems: Adorno, in fact, never explains how the exchange abstraction has come to acquire its constituting function. Rather, he seems to presuppose exchange as the all-pervasive principle that mediates all aspects of the social reality. As a result, Adorno lacks an adequate account of the genesis of the social totality, which threatens to deprive his theory of social domination of much of his critical edge. Finally, by neglecting Marx's categories of abstract labour, money, and capital, Adorno's description of the fetish character of the exchange abstraction from the use-value of things disconnects these two categories from the circulation and reproduction processes that determine them, thereby overlooking that within capitalist societies all things are structured as commodities in virtue not of exchange as such but rather of the role played by money. To put it in Lotz's words, to count as the ruling principle of capitalist society "value […] must establish itself as something independent from the process of production and consumption", but that occurs only with money "as something *separate* from circulation and as something *identical* despite circulation and consumption", whereby "it functions […] as the universal schema through which all entities in capitalism are socially schematized, and, hence, are becoming meaningful". Adorno, instead, stops with the principle of exchange, with the consequence that he tends to miss the historical "specificity of the Capitalist form".[67]

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[66] Ibid., p. 149.
[67] Lotz, "Capitalist Schematization", p. 120. Even worse, sometimes Adorno characterizes exchange as something taking place "from time immemorial" (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 146, Redmond's translation used).

2. Disciplinary Power and Modern Individuation

Notwithstanding the exaggerating cast of his reflections[68], Adorno's holistic portrait of social reality as a complex whole whose interconnected elements respond to the logic of the capitalist exchange principle marks a major difference between his account of social domination and Foucault's genealogical investigations of modern power. In order to substantiate this claim, below I shall start by explaining the general features of Foucault's theory of domination, while stressing the conceptual contraposition Foucault himself draws between his strategic analytics of power and the juridical representation of power as sovereignty. First of all, though, it is necessary to provide a preliminary clarification: during the so-called "genealogical phase" of his philosophical enterprise, Foucault employs the notion of power and domination interchangeably. Here I shall stick to this conflation, presenting the main characteristics of his early conception of power. Conversely, in the next chapter I shall examine Foucault's late disavowal of such identification as a consequence of his reformulation of power relations in terms of "government" and clarify the elements of discontinuity such a reformulation introduces with respect to his initial approach. All this said, let's begin to examine Foucault's genealogy of modern power as he elaborates it in the early 1970s.

Dismissing the view of social reality as a structure configured on the basis of a single principle, Foucault's genealogy starts from the idea to develop a theory of domination

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[68] Adorno explicitly confesses that his account of the all-pervasiveness of capitalist exchange in late modern society follows "the maxim that only exaggeration per se today is the medium of truth" (Adorno, "The Meaning of Working Through the Past", p. 99), whereby his claims might sound hyperbolic. For Adorno, however, there is at least a sense in which his extreme picture needs to be taken literally: indeed, it discloses an objective historical tendency that "determines the signature of an age, even if its validity might be limited both quantitatively and qualitatively" (Adorno, "Theory of Pseudo-Culture", pp. 22–3, translation amended). As it will become clearer in the text below, for Adorno, it is precisely this tendency towards "the worst", i.e. totalitarian forms of domination comparable to the horror of Nazism, that calls for an exaggerated style of thinking. Knowing the worst, in fact, allows us to convict society for being already as bad as to make it possible (Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 83).

capable of grasping the multiplicity of concrete relations of power without assigning priority to any of them:

> Power is not a something that can be possessed, and it is not a form of might; power is never anything more than a relationship that can, and must, be studied only by looking at the interplay between the terms of that relationship.[69]

As a result, adopting his well-known nominalist stance, Foucault qualifies his inquiry as less "a theory of power" than an "analytics of power". Far from assuming a prior and universal representation of it, this approach regards power as "something that is exercised and that [...] exists only in action"[70], whereby it seeks to define the "domain formed by relations of power"[71] and determine the instruments that enable the analysis of their configurations within historically specific social and cultural contexts. That draws a neat line of demarcation between Foucault's theory of domination and the modern theories of sovereignty. Following Hobbes' seminal model of the Leviathan, these theories interpret power as a juridical notion grounded in the social contract through which individuals deliberately concede their freedom to a sovereign authority, while identifying the essential question with the legitimacy or illegitimacy of this form of power. As a result, such a conception of power comes to be marked by the following three postulates[72]:

(1) Power is thought of "as a right which can be possessed in the way one possesses a commodity, and which can therefore be transferred or alienated, either completely or

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[69] Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, p. 168.
[70] Ibid., p. 14
[71] Foucault, *History of Sexuality 1*, p. 82.
[72] Foucault is fully aware of the abridged and schematic character of this exposition, which cannot do justice to the complexity of most of the modern political theories. Despite its oversimplification, however, Foucault's interest lies not so much in accounting for the differences of the various political discourses as in highlighting their commonalities.

partly".[73]

(2) Power is marked by a top-down dynamic stemming from a central point, which implies the existence of a unitary will expressing it.[74] Power, therefore, coincides with political power and comes to be concentrated within state apparatuses.

(3) Power has a functional character and its framework of intelligibility is a negative one. Power, in fact, refers to the notions of coercion, censorship, law, prohibition, repression, and submission.[75]

Now, according Foucault, the basic condition of an analytics of power resides in the rejection of this juridico-negative model, namely in the attempt "to cut off the head of the king".[76] Indeed, while it played an essential role not only in the legitimation of the great feudal monarchies but also in the edification of the modern democracies[77], the juridico-negative conception of power remains inadequate to grasp the complexity of modern power. On his view, far from being restricted to its sovereign form, modern power should be regarded as involving a set of localised, unstable, and inegalitarian relations, which can hardly be reduced to a single organizing principle.[78] This means that "power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere"[79]. Thus, the best metaphor to capture the effective deployment of power is that of a capillary network of force relations generated from below and coextensive with the entire social body.

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[73] Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, p. 13.
[74] Foucault, *History of Sexuality 1*, p. 93.
[75] "It is a power that only has the force of the negative on its side, a power to say no; in no condition to produce, capable only of posting limits, it is basically anti-energy" (Ibid., 85).
[76] Ibid., p. 89.
[77] As Foucault clarifies, the Enlightenment critique of absolutism was levelled not against the juridico-monarchical system per se but rather against the continuous violation of right by the arbitrary exercise of monarchical power. In this sense, the critique of absolute despotism just shifted the attention from the sovereignty of the king to the sovereignty of the people, without actually questioning the systematic role played by the structure of right in the effective mechanisms of domination (see Ibid., p. 88).
[78] See Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, p. 45.
[79] Foucault, *History of Sexuality 1*, p. 93.

Here, a striking difference from Adorno's account emerges: whereas Adorno continues to regard capitalist economy as the primary source of domination – whereby capitalist exchange colonizes the internal dynamics of the modern social spheres –, Foucault denies not only that all modes of relation can be boiled down to economic ones, but also that power can provide a universal framework capable of explaining everything.[80] From a Foucauldian perspective, Adorno's picture of social domination appears to be marred by an underlying economism, which despite all theoretical differences the Marxist tradition shares with liberal political theories. Indeed, while liberals have modelled power on the idea of a commodity, Marxism considers power only in terms of its "economic functionality", whereby "the role of power is essentially both to perpetuate the relations of production and to reproduce class domination".[81] Contrary to such an approach, while he recognizes the intensification of class struggle[82] and the persistent relevance of economic factors for the analysis of power relationships, Foucault concentrates his focus on their intrinsic correlation, without restricting power relations to a matter of mere adequacy or derivation. Unlike Adorno, then, Foucault does not think of power as "a phenomenon of mass and homogeneous domination"[83] grounded in the self-regulated domain of the economy. On his view, instead, power describes a strategic struggle between "intentional and nonsubjective"[84] forces, which "are not in a relationship of

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[80] "I've never claimed that power was going to explain everything. My problem was not to replace an economic explanation with an explanation in terms of power" (Foucault, "Interview with Michel Foucault", p. 284).

[81] Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, p. 14, translation amended.

[82] See Foucault, "Rituals of Exclusion", p. 73. Interestingly, Foucault argues that history has been "undeniably" a matter of class struggle, but no one, not even Marx, has ever clarified what struggle is (Foucault, "Méthodologie pour la connaissance du monde: comment se débarrasser du marxisme", p. 606).

[83] Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, p. 29.

[84] While the term "non subjective" refers to the fact that no individual subject controls power relations, by "intentional" Foucault means that they always imply a calculation in view of a specific end. For a helpful discussion of this point see McLaren, *Feminism, Foucault, and Embodied Subjectivity*, pp. 37–8.

exteriority with respect to other types of relationships (economic processes, knowledge relationships, sexual relations), but are immanent in the latter".[85] This means that, far from proposing an essentialist account[86], Foucault's conception of power is a pluralist one, whose logic is driven by what Foucault himself calls the "connection between the heterogeneous".[87] To state it differently, by the notion of power Foucault means a reticular cluster of local tactics of domination characterizing social relations, which might either conflictually diverge or coagulate within the wider framework of global strategies anchored in the institutional and political macro-structures of a given society:

> Power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions or contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatuses, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies.[88]

On my view, there are two remarkable consequences deriving from the divergence between Foucault's approach and Adorno's: (1) Foucault's analytical framework

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[85] Foucault, *History of Sexuality 1*, p. 94.
[86] Poulantzas levels a similar charge in *State, Power, Socialism*, p. 149. For a more recent critical appraisal that shares Poulantzas' conclusions, see Rehmann, *Theories of Ideology*, pp. 201–10.
[87] Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 42. In this sense, Foucault seeks to show "how it [power] is always born of something other than itself […] and there is no Power, but power relationships that are being born incessantly, as both effect and condition of other processes" (Foucault, "Clarifications on the Question of Power", pp. 259–60).
[88] Foucault, *History of Sexuality 1*, 92–3. Hence, there are two senses according which Foucault employs the term "strategic". Indeed, the latter might refer to the nature of every power relation (broader sense) or to the macro-level structures of power marking each society (narrower sense). I shall come back on the question of the relationship between the macro- and micro-level of power later in this chapter.

seems to enjoy a more fine-grained capacity for diagnostic insight than Adorno's account. Indeed, by presenting exchange as the universal model of an almighty, top-down form of ideological power, Adorno runs the risk of reducing domination to the abstract unity of an all-pervasive and diverted process of rationalization, which tends not only to blur the complex and negotiable interaction between different material structures of power, but even to undermine the historical and conjunctural character of his critical interventions. A glaring example of this is the controversial similarity Adorno recognizes between the fascist totalitarianism of Nazi Germany and the political structures of advanced liberal democracies: as Hammer puts it, for Adorno, they both "complete a more general world-historical passage towards greater abstraction, rationalization, and repetition"[89], whose administration allows the capitalist wheel to "turn full circle".[90] On the contrary, Foucault's inquiries maintain an evental nature geared to reveal the historical and regional specificity of a multiple variety of practices, institutions, and rationalities. For instance, as a response to those who blame him for not making any distinction between totalitarian regimes and democratic regimes, Foucault declares:

> I make an effort to explain why and how these systems came into existence at a particular time, in a particular country, to satisfy certain needs. […] The concentration camps? They're considered to be a British invention […] [and] have been one of the chief instruments of totalitarian regimes. This is an example of a transposition of a technique of power. But […] I'm not inclined to think, that the existence of

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[89] Hammer, *Adorno and the Political*, p. 16. Strangely, however, Hammer fails to identify the dominant source of this overwhelming process of rationalization, which does not lie in the techno-administrative complexes of contemporary society but rather in the abstract logic of the capitalist exchange principle.

[90] Adorno, "Society", p. 153, translation amended.

concentration camps in both democratic and totalitarian countries shows that there are no differences between those countries.[91]

(2) Adorno's picture of domination leads him to stress the violent and oppressive dimension of power as a seemingly frictionless system of social integration for which nobody appears to be really responsible:

> Power confronts the individual […] as the reason which informs reality. The power of all the members of society […] is constantly summated, through the division of labour imposed on them, in the realization of the whole […]. […] the oppression of society always bears the features of oppression by a collective.[92]

Put differently, Adorno tends to identify domination with the idea of a repressive "preponderance of innumerable social processes over […] living people"[93], which means that the putative mechanics of power at play in late modern societies falls within the semantic field of submission and oppression. *Prima facie*, then, there is a clear contrast between Adorno's account and the major contribution of Foucault's genealogical works, namely their emphasis on the positive nature of modern power technologies:

> What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is […] that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to

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[91] Foucault, "Interview with Michel Foucault", p. 293. This passage clearly puts in perspective Cook's comparative reconstruction of Adorno's and Foucault's critique of modernity, according to which "like Adorno, [Foucault] sees a 'straight line' between democratic and fascist societies" (Cook, "Adorno, Foucault and Critique", p. 6).

[92] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 16.

[93] Adorno, "Discussion of Professor Adorno's Lecture 'The Meaning of Working Through the Past'", p. 296.

be considered as a productive network [...] much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression.[94]

Such a discrepancy, however, overshadows a fundamental convergence in their analyses. Indeed, as I shall show below, both Foucault *and* Adorno insist on the constitutive character of social domination, whereby it looks like Foucault's interpretation of repression as a tactical component of a global and productive strategy of power[95] can be extended to better comprehend Adorno's account of social domination. To this end, I shall broach a comparative examination of Adorno's and Foucault's respective views on the social constitution of the individual, focusing preeminently on the processes of disciplinary normalization put in place by modern power.

As Cook remarks, "Adorno and Foucault broadly agree that what we are as individuals, along with our understanding of ourselves as individuals, have been affected by social forces of which we are often unaware and over which we exercise little or no control".[96] On Adorno's account, this can be explained starting from our subservience to the capitalist exchange principle, which determines the reification of all aspects of human life by decreeing human beings' coercive dependency "on those objectivities" of the world of commodities [*Warenwelt*] "that remain obscure to them".[97] In this respect, criticizing Lukács' concept of reification for merely describing a subjective form of consciousness[98] –, Adorno regards reification as a secondary phenomenon, which cannot be reduced only to a matter of false consciousness insofar as it points to the effective transformation of "non-identical

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[94] Foucault, "Truth and Power", p. 119.
[95] See Foucault, *History of Sexuality 1*, p. 12.
[96] Cook, "Notes on Individuation in Adorno and Foucault", pp. 325–26, text amended.
[97] See Adorno, "Über Marx und die Grundbegriffe der soziologischen Theorie", p. 508, my translation.
[98] I shall leave to Lukács' scholars the task to defend him from Adorno's charge.

individuals and performances" into "commensurable and identical" things. [99] Consequently, Jay is right when he claims that in Adorno reification generally amounts to "the suppression of heterogeneity in the name of identity". What Jay fails to appreciate, however, is how reification *does* work by promoting an "alienated objectification of subjectivity"[100], whose process Adorno clarifies mostly through his psychoanalytic gloss of the passage from the 19th century competition-driven capitalism to the monopolistic capitalism of the 20th century. For Adorno, this historical shift has led to the collapse of the authority structure of the family and to the consequent disappearance of the old type of autonomous subjectivity. Indeed, deprived of the reference point represented by the authoritative father – the formerly independent entrepreneur who has become a wage-labourer or a salaried employee –, the orphan individuals of late mass society loose the "unity, continuity, and substantiality" which distinguished the "accomplished, constant, and autonomous" figure psychology considered as the main category of liberalism. As a result, although the autonomy individuals enjoyed during capitalism's liberal heyday was already "a function of a society based on exchange"[101], what takes shape with the new socio-economic configuration of 1930s and 1940s is a situation in which this semi-autonomy is definitively eroded, while the collective gains a direct hold onto the individual itself. This means that the formation of the super-ego is no longer a prerogative of the family structure, but rather comes under the aegis of the capitalist totality: under the influence of the sophisticated psychotechnologies of mass media, culture industry, and political propaganda, super-ego becomes the main vehicle of "blindly, unconsciously internalized social coercion"[102], which lies at the root of the

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[99] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 146.
[100] Jay, *Adorno*, p. 68.
[101] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 262, translations amended.
[102] Ibid., p. 272.

weakening of the monadic structure of the ego as well as of the widespread diffusion of narcissism as the emblematic "psychological affliction" of contemporary society.[103] Stressing the reduction of all human activities to the dimensions of manipulation and administration, Adorno can thus claim that

> not only is domination paid for with the estrangement of human beings from the dominated objects, but the relationships of human beings, including the relationship of individuals to themselves, have themselves been bewitched by the reification of mind.[104]

Utterly dependent on the "social power structure", individuals believe "they have escaped the primacy of economics – all the way into their psychology, the *maison tolérée* of uncomprehended individuality –", but actually "they [just] react under the compulsion of the universal"[105]. Hence, what marks the new anthropological type of the "radio generation" is the regression of the individual as *zoon politikon* to an "object of abstractly *normed* behaviour", immediately subjected to the exigencies of the administered order and the Taylorism of capitalist production.[106] One might reformulate the point by saying that, for Adorno, the individual is not just "entwined in society", but "it owes society its existence in the most literal sense", since "all its content comes from society" itself.[107] As far as material needs are concerned, for instance, Adorno upholds that they are not naturally invariant but rather a socio-historical category that "has become a function of profit interests"[108], whereby

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[103] Adorno, "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda", p. 134. In this sense, connecting narcissism with reification, in his 1952 essay "Revidierte Psychoanalyse" Adorno explicitly maintains that narcissism "in its present form is nothing else than the individual's desperate struggle to compensate at least partially for injustice: that no one ever gets his money's worth in the society of universal exchange" (Adorno, "Revidierte Psychoanalyse", p. 33, my translation).
[104] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 21, translation amended.
[105] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 311.
[106] Adorno, "Society", p. 151.
[107] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 154.
[108] Adorno, "Sociology and Psychology (Part I)", p. 77.

"nothing can be thought, written, done, or made that goes beyond this society – a society which largely maintains its power through the needs of those who are at its mercy".[109] In brief, relying on his analyses of late modernity's synergetic alliance between monopoly capitalism and state power as well as of the devious mechanisms of culture industry, Adorno argues that individuation takes place through a process of normalization which compels subjects to conform their identity to the ruling standards of what counts as healthy, normal, fit, productive, and moral, while consigning to the "enemy camp" any expression of difference, abnormality, and dissensus.[110]

Adorno's claims concerning the normalizing effects of the domination exerted by public institutions and private agencies over individuals are echoed in the genealogical inquiries Foucault dedicates to the historical invention of disciplines between the 17th and 18th century, whose centrality as the model of power *par excellence* is grounded in Foucault's earlier description of it as the dominant form of power exercise up until the 1970s.[111] Indeed, contrary to the discontinuous and exceptional mechanisms of appropriation and "deduction" [*prélèvement*] marking sovereign power, for Foucault modern disciplinary apparatuses work by "generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them".[112] Identifying the point of application of their techniques with a "body that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved"[113], discipline proceeds by operating a pervasive codification of existence, which aims at training body forces by constituting gestures and modes of behaviour, moulding habits, and crafting spaces and times, whereby body always stands not for a

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[109]Adorno, "Thesen über Bedürfnis", p. 395, my translation.

[110] See, for instance, Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, pp. 131–32. See also Adorno, "Anmerkungen zum sozialen Konflikt heute", p. 185

[111] See Foucault, "On Popular Justice", p. 18. As I shall show in the next chapter, Foucault remarkably changes his view with his later "discovery" of biopolitics.

[112] Foucault, *History of Sexuality 1*, p. 136.

[113] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish,* p. 136.

"natural" body that has to be liberated but rather for a "political body".[114] Hence, disciplines involve a constant, hierarchical, and meticulous surveillance of each and every individual, which is directed at combining the increase of their economic utility with their political subjection [*assujettissement*].[115] The result is that modern society appears not as a community of equal subjects of right but rather as a "system of coercion" produced by disciplines, wherein any sign of deviance is punished with marginalization and confinement. More precisely, like Adorno, Foucault points to the concurrence of disciplines with the birth of formally egalitarian legal frameworks, whereby conformity ends up representing the "dark side"[116] of modern representative democracies:

> The general juridical form that guaranteed a system of rights that were egalitarian in
> principle was supported […] by all those systems of micro-power that are essentially
> non-egalitarian and asymmetrical that we call the disciplines. […] The 'Enlightenment',
> which discovered the liberties, also invented the disciplines.[117]

Put otherwise, for both authors, under the guise of moral and political emancipation the progress of civilization reveals itself as a process that refines the technical instruments of social domination, thereby reinforcing the subjection of individuals through the fabrication of an apparently entrenched, uniformed identity. [118] Nonetheless, this does not mean that Adorno and Foucault consider the notion of a

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[114] Foucault's emphasis on the material techniques of disciplinary power runs against Butler's reductive conflation of Foucault's notion of power with the productive operations of the discursive dimension of language or the symbolic (see, for instance, Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, especially chapter 3).
[115] "The historical moment of the disciplines was the moment when an art of the human body was born, which was directed not only at the growth of its skills, nor at the intensification of its subjection, but at the formation of a relation that in the mechanism itself makes it more obedient as it becomes more useful, and conversely" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 137–38).
[116] Adorno, *History and Freedom*, p. 211.
[117] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 222.
[118] See also Honneth, "Foucault and Adorno", pp. 126–27.

subject of right at the basis of the bourgeois theory of society as simply false. On the one hand, they certainly think it has an "ideological" function, insofar as it veils the fact "that not only the individual, but the category of individuality, is a product of society"[119]. On the other, however, they also regard the modern individual as a reality fabricated by an anonymous instance of power, which constitutes – as Foucault further clarifies – both an extension of the principles of right onto the meticulous level of individual existence and a sort of "counter-law". By the latter term Foucault means that disciplines create a "'private' link" which brings into existence "insurmountable asymmetries as well as excluding reciprocities" and at the same time blurs the "political" nature of social relations.[120] Such a difference between sovereign law and disciplinary power mechanisms is grounded in their opposed use of the concept of rule: whereas the rule of law is the result of a sovereign will, disciplines work by reference to a "natural" norm, whose theoretical background is represented by the development of the modern human sciences at the centre of Foucault's earlier archaeological writings. Indeed, as an individualizing technology developed and perfected in specific loci (barracks, prisons, hospitals, schools, etc.), the disciplinary production of "'docile' bodies"[121] presupposes the accumulation of a clear and exact knowledge of man, while this knowledge finds "its technical matrix in the petty, malicious minutiae of the disciplines".[122] In other words, refuting the idea of an exteriority of knowledge with regard to power and re-qualifying at the same time the instrumental reading of their relationship, Foucault argues that the historical development of the human sciences and the birth of disciplinary technologies represent two mutually supporting processes:

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[119] Adorno, "Revidierte Psychoanalyse", p. 27, Cook's translation in Cook, *Adorno, Habermas and the Search for a Rational Society*, p. 46.
[120] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 222, translation amended.
[121] Ibid., p. 138.
[122] Ibid., p. 226, translation amended.

No knowledge is formed without a system of communication, registration, accumulation,

and displacement that is in itself a form of power [...]. No power, on the other hand, is

exercised without the extraction, appropriation, distribution, or restraint of a knowledge.

At this level there is not knowledge [*connaissance*] on one side and society on the other,

or science and the state, but the basic forms of "power-knowledge" [*"pouvoir-*

savoir"].[123]

Though some passages might convey the impression that it presents a "structural

invariant" endowed with a quasi-transcendental function[124], this concept of power-

knowledge should be better understood as an "analytical grid"[125], which is tightly

connected to the circular entanglement of subjection and objectification

[*objectivation*] distinguishing disciplinary power. Indeed, Foucault repeatedly points

to the structural imbrication of the disciplinary techniques of subjection with the

corresponding discursive procedures of the human sciences through which new

objects of knowledge are produced and individuals themselves are turned into objects

of endless surveillance.[126] In order to capture this circular dynamics, Foucault coins a

new notion, i.e. that of "regime of truth". Far from being reducible to an ideological

veil or to a superstructural framework, the latter concept designates the "general

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[123] Foucault, "Penal Theories and Institutions", p. 17. See also Foucault, *Discipline and Punish,* p. 27. As Foucault himself warns us against potential misinterpretations, such a circularity between power and knowledge does not mean that they are identical: "Between techniques of knowledge and strategies of power, there is no exteriority, even if they have specific roles and are linked together on the basis of their difference" (Foucault, *History of Sexuality 1*, p. 98).

[124] See, for instance, Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 27–8. For an interpretation which claims that for Foucault power is transcendental see Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of* Modernity, pp. 253–54. A more nuanced reading can be found in Han, *Foucault's Critical Project*, pp. 142–43.

[125] Foucault, "What is Critique?", p. 60.

[126] "The formation of knowledge and the increase of power regularly reinforce one another in a circular process. [...] it was this link, proper to the technological systems, that made possible within the disciplinary element the formation of clinical medicine, psychiatry, child psychology, educational psychology, the rationalization of labour. It is a double process, then: an epistemological 'thaw' through a refinement of power relations; a multiplication of the effects of power through the formation and accumulation of new forms of knowledge" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 224) Doubtlessly, the paradigmatic example of this circular dynamic is represented by Bentham's figure of the Panopticon discussed in *Discipline and Punish*, whose anonymous schema of detailed and permanent visibility provides the technological principle governing not only the examining activity of the human sciences (whether in the form of medical healing or childhood education) but also the functioning of the institutions composing the social body (hospitals, schools, factories, etc.). See Ibid., pp. 195–228.

politics" of truth regulating the "system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements"[127] marking each society, whose scientific acceptability depends on their practical function rather than on their theoretical content. In this sense, a regime of truth is a strategic matrix geared to shape the structural interconnectedness between processes of subjection and objectifying discourses, within which truth becomes a tactical element in the struggles between opposing forces. That is the reason why, characterizing the historical distinctiveness of the "political economy of truth" in modern Western societies, Foucault writes:

> 'Truth' is centred on the form of scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it; it is subject to *constant economic and political incitement* […]; it is the object, under diverse forms, of immense diffusion and consumption […]; it is *produced and transmitted* under the control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses (university, army, writing, media); lastly, it is the issue of a whole political debate and social confrontation ('ideological' struggles).[128]

As a result, while political subjection robs individuals of their identity as legal subjects by tiring out their capacity for resistance, the epistemological procedures of human sciences mould, classify, and hierarchize them into individualised cases, thus rendering them prone to further disciplinary normalization.[129]

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[127] Foucault, "Truth and Power", p. 133.

[128] Ibid., p. 131, emphasis added.

[129] "All the great disciplinary machines: barracks, schools, workshops and prisons, are machines that allow to circumscribe the individual, to know what he is, what he does, what can be done with him, where it is necessary to locate him, how he is to be placed among others. The human sciences are forms of knowledge which make it possible to know what individuals are, who is normal and who is not […]. [Disciplinary mechanisms] turn the individual, his existence and his behaviour […] into an element [*événement*] which is relevant, necessary even, indispensable for the exercise of power in modern societies" (Foucault, "La philosophie analytique de la politique", p. 551, my translation).

In sum, the picture of the modern processes of individuation that Foucault's genealogical analytics of power provides us with is strikingly similar to Adorno's. Identifying European modernity's historical emergence in the period between the 18th and the 19th century – roughly corresponding to the age of the Enlightenment –, for Foucault, this epoch witnesses the development of new *dispositifs* of power[130], in which the discourses of scientists and experts converged with various techniques for the disciplinary dressage of body forces in order to impose a generalized homogenization of individuals through their subjection to a coercive system of quasi-natural and identificatory norms regulated by the dominant social institutions, including the family structure.[131] In this sense, the universal validity claims of the humanistic consciousness of the Enlightenment appear to Foucault's eyes just as a super-structural, quasi-ideological façade, which supports domination in the guise of an ordaining knowledge.[132] Likewise, Adorno holds that the development of modernity that started with the displacement of the feudal system by the free market economy in the Renaissance reaches its culmination in the 19th century.[133] On his view, in fact, such a process constitutes new anthropological types such as

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[130] Appearing for the first time during the 1970s, the term "*dispositif*" (translated into English as "apparatus" or "deployment") designates a material set of techniques, strategies and modes of subjection put into place by power. Thus, this notion has a heterogeneous nature, including discourses, practices, institutions, as well as tactics. That's the reason why, depending on the case, Foucault speaks about "*dispositifs* of power", "*dispositifs* of knowledge", "disciplinary *dispositfs*", and as we shall see below of the "*dispositif* of sexuality". Indeed, in a 1977 interview we can read that a *dispositif* is "a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid" (Foucault, "The Confession of the Flesh", p. 194).

[131] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 184. On the role of the family in the consolidation of disciplinary power see Foucault, *Psychiatric Power*, p. 81: family "is the hinge, the interlocking point, which is absolutely indispensable to the very functioning of all the disciplinary systems. I mean that the family is the instance of constraint that will permanently fix individuals to their disciplinary apparatuses [*appareils*], which will inject them, so to speak, into the disciplinary apparatuses [*appareils*]. It is because there is the family […] that the obligation to attend school works and children, individuals, these somatic singularities, are fixed and finally individualized within the school system. […] The first role of the family with regard to disciplinary apparatuses [*appareils*], therefore, is this kind of pinning of individuals to the disciplinary apparatus [*appareil*]".

[132] I shall come back on this issue in the next section.

[133] Indeed, as Adorno explicitly claims, Renaissance is the time when the category of individual at the basis of the free market economy was first discovered (see Adorno, *History and Freedom*, p. 86).

entrepreneurs and waged labourers, while altering the individual's mode of self-understanding by forging new concepts – like those of "personal responsibility, prudence, the self-sufficient individual, the fulfilment of duty, but also of rigid moral constraint, an internalized bond with authority"[134] –, which find their universal affirmation at the height of the liberal phase of capitalist competition. Nonetheless, with the late modern passage of the principle of competition "from the objectivity of the social process into the composition of its colliding and jostling atoms"[135], the individuals' survival no longer depends on their capacity to compete with one another but rather on the conditions imposed by monopoly capitalism and the welfare state. Today, then, individuation consists in the internalized adaptation to social norms geared to define accepted modes of behaviour, legitimate forms of thought, and admissible need satisfactions, whereby individuals are left with (almost) no immunizing defence against the heteronomous determination of experience by the overarching apparatuses of the capitalist totality.

However, this should not lead us to overlook the remarkable differences between Adorno's and Foucault's respective approaches. In effect, the common results of their diagnoses derive from argumentations that are so different that they might appear as mutually complementary. On the one hand, for Adorno, the domination exercised by the centralized organizations of the totally administered society over individuals affects primarily their psychosomatic dimension, shaping their instincts, desires, and needs. As mere appendages of the two ever-increasing social spheres of production and consumption, under late capitalism individuals recede to a weak state in which the self-preserving function of the ego is no longer a prerogative of the individual's rational faculties, but rather is "largely confined to the unconscious" in order to

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[134] Adorno, "Individuum und Organisation", p. 450, my translation.
[135] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 27.

comply with the "often senseless renunciations" demanded by society for surviving.[136] Accordingly, in his 1964–65 lectures, Adorno writes that

> the historical coercion which moulds human beings enters into the very core of their psyche and their subjectivity is in a sense shaped by this socialization process. The more individuals identify with the universal – not consciously, but in their unconscious and preconscious reactions – the more they can be said to distance themselves in a sense from the universal by the fact that their identification with it is […] a form of adaptation.[137]

This socio-psychological account, however, has a major shortcoming: indeed, Adorno shies away from elaborating on the mechanisms of social integration at the basis of Fordist mass society, which do not work mainly through strategies for the manipulation of consciousness, "but rather through 'material' apparatuses, spatial arrangements, and systems of 'ortho-practices'".[138] On the other hand, it is exactly this material dimension of domination that Foucault aims to reveal by drawing a "history of bodies", in which "the biological and historical […] are bound together […] in accordance with the development of the modern technologies of power that take life as their objective".[139] Doubtlessly, like Adorno, Foucault also explores the influence power exerts on human psychology. According to his study of the architectonic figure of the Panopticon, for instance, Foucault argues that under the invisible, centralized gaze of disciplinary power the surveilled prisoner is coercively inserted into a field of permanent and detailed visibility, which triggers the

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[136] Adorno, "Sociology and Psychology (Part II)", p. 87.
[137] Adorno, *History and Freedom*, p. 71.
[138] Rehmann, *Theories of Ideology*, p. 92. Rehmann's criticism is too strong. As I shall show in the next chapter, Adorno's *does* offer us some remarks in this direction, though they remain largely underdeveloped.
[139] Foucault, *History of Sexuality 1*, pp. 151–52.

internalization of the observing gaze "to the point that he becomes his own overseer: everyone in this way exercises surveillance over and against himself".[140] Relying on similar claims, Cook emphasizes the affinity of Foucault's account of modern power with Freud's ideas about the formation of super-ego, whereby domination would basically consist of a process of internalization of disciplinary norms that turns individuals into "the principle of their own subjection".[141] *Pace* Cook, however, Foucault explicitly denies that all the numerous and diverse techniques of power developed in modern societies can be reduced to the principle of visibility and observation at the basis of panopticism.[142] Moreover, Cook's prevalent focus on the mechanisms of internalization appears to suggest that consciousness is the ultimate, real target of power, whose action would externally impinge on the body in order to manipulate the individual's psyche. Yet, as his argument in *Discipline and Punish* clarifies, Foucault's point is not so much to reveal the power mechanisms that condition individual consciousness as to show how that which he calls the modern "soul" constitutes the instrument of a "political anatomy" geared to individualize the subject through the disciplinary dressage of its own body. Rejecting metaphysical dualism, in fact, by the notion of "soul" Foucault means a "duplication" of the body, which results from the repeated exercise of gestures, the learning of modes of behaviour, and the acquisition of habits. In this respect, far from being a mere ideological illusion, the soul has a "corporal existence" marked by a certain historical reality, which "is produced permanently around, on, within the body by the

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[140] Foucault, "The Eye of Power", p. 233.

[141] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 203. See Cook, "Notes on Individuation in Adorno and Foucault", p. 332.

[142] Foucault, "The Eye of Power", p. 227. Confining oneself to *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault groups the operations of discipline in four categories: the art of spatial distribution; the control of activity, which is preoccupied with time; the organization of genesis oriented to obtain the highest degree of efficiency; and the composition of forces, which addresses individuals as elements within a larger whole. All these categories, then, have subcategories. For a helpful analysis of these categories see McLaren, *Feminism, Foucault and Embodied Subjectivity*, pp. 88–90.

functioning of a power that is exercised on those punished – and, in a more general way, on those one supervises, trains and corrects, […] over those who are stuck at a machine and supervised for the rest of their lives".[143] To put it in a nutshell, for Foucault, it is through the inscription of socio-cultural norms on the body that disciplinary power operates: its power-knowledge apparatuses target the body to fabricate an interiority (the soul), which, in turn, ensures their reach onto the body itself. Accordingly, Honneth misinterprets Foucault when he claims that for the latter the individual is only the product of discourses and technologies of power capable of creating it *ex nihilo*.[144] Indeed, Foucault follows Nietzsche in understanding the individual as shaped by relations of power which operate on "things that certainly exist"[145] but only through the historically specific lens of the cultural and social practices at play in a given time – such as bodies, energies, desires, forces, pleasures, matters, and capacities.[146] Rather, the problem with Foucault's "genealogy of the modern soul" is two-fold: on the one hand, Foucault conceptualizes subjects exclusively with reference to the power-knowledge deployments manufacturing them, thereby falling prey to a one-sided explanation that overlooks the *sui generis* reality of subjectivity itself. On the other, his reduction of the materiality of subjectivity to a mere extension of the physical procedures of disciplinary control prevents Foucault from accounting for the function carried out by processes of self-constitution as

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[143] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 29.

[144] "The specific deficit of Foucault's argument undoubtedly consists in the fact that it deduces first from social influences (which are themselves presented as merely external coercive procedures that produce subjects) the formation of a sort of psychic life of humans, and it then connects the representation of the "human soul" directly to this" (A. Honneth, "Foucault's Theory of Society", p. 169. See also Honneth, "Foucault and Adorno", p. 131).

[145] Veyne , *Foucault: His Thought, His Character*, p. 11.

[146] See, for instance, Foucault, "Questions on Geography", pp. 73–74. For an extensive comparison of Nietzsche's and Foucault's theories, see Saar, *Genealogie als Kritik.* Parenthetically, this undermines Butler's interpretation of Foucault as endorsing a social inscription model of the body understood as a "blank page" (see Butler, *Gender Trouble* p. 130). Due to space constraints, I cannot do justice to Butler's rather complicated argument here, for which I refer the reader to McLaren, *Feminism, Foucault and Embodied Subjectivity*, pp. 99–106.

relays for the influence of power. In brief, while his objective is to put an end to the theory of the sovereign, constituent subject, Foucault remains negatively tied to the horizon of its problematic, limiting himself to stressing the heteronomy of modern subjectivity. As Lemke puts it, Foucault's analytics of power "changes site, but not field".[147]

3. Reason and Ideology

The previous two sections have raised the issue of the relationship between reason and power Adorno and Foucault see at the core of the historical development of Enlightenment modernity. As McCarthy has argued, the Frankfurt School and Foucault share a common conception of reason as marked by an intrinsic "impurity": what defines reason is "its embeddedness in culture and society, its entanglement with power and interest, the historical variability of its categories and criteria, the embodied, sensuous and practically engaged character of its bearers".[148] Here, following Adorno's dictum that "social critique is critique of knowledge, and vice versa"[149], I shall provide a detailed account of Adorno's and Foucault's respective understandings of rationality and show how they inform their critique of modernity's socio-cultural structures. Accordingly, the section will open by discussing the connection Adorno draws between the "universal extension of the market system" and the world-historical "process of increasing social rationalization".[150] I shall then contrast Adorno's monolithic and speculative account of reason with Foucault's historical and pluralist approach to the question of rationality, arguing in favour of the latter as a more effective modality of critical inquiry. Finally, the section will

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[147] Lemke, *Eine Kritik der Politischen Vernunft*, p. 116.
[148] McCarthy, "The Critique of Impure Reason", p. 437.
[149] Adorno, "Subject and Object", p. 143.
[150] Adorno, "Society", p. 149.

conclude by addressing Foucault's and Adorno's respective views on the notion of ideology.

In keeping with the "reconstruction of the prehistory of subjectivity"[151] Horkheimer and Adorno advance in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, what has become the dominant mode of thinking in the West is grounded in a world-historical process leading to the affirmation of a calculating and instrumental rationality oriented to ensuring human beings' self-preservation against the hostile forces of the external nature. The separation from nature granted by the faculties of reason and language, however, is not costless. Mastery over nature naturalizes not only domination over other human beings *qua* pieces of nature but also self-domination, namely the repression of man's own natural drives and instincts, especially of the unconscious wish to become one with nature in a state marked by pure freedom and joy.[152] Indeed, as Adorno and Horkheimer argue, the advance of civilization hangs upon the painful negation of such a wish for the sake of self-preservation and a future promise of happiness as mediated compensation for the sacrifice of the pleasure entailed in the primordial unity with nature.[153] The first demand, however, has outweighed the second one: the repression of humanity's basic longing for nature takes the shape of a paranoid projection[154], which results not only in the delusion of persecution from

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[151] Thyen, *Negative Dialektik und Erfahrung*, p. 109, my translation.

[152] This wish is expressed by the allurement of the sirens according to Horkheimer and Adorno's reading of the myth of Odysseus (see Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 55). Their song represents the promised pleasure implied in the identification with nature, which constantly threatens to bring human civilization to an end: "Humanity had to inflict terrible injuries on itself before the self – the identical, purpose-directed, masculine character of human beings – was created, and something of this process is repeated in every childhood. The effort to hold itself together attends the ego at all its stages, and the temptation to be rid of the ego has always gone hand-in-hand with the blind determination to preserve it […] The fear of losing the self, and suspending with it the boundary between oneself and other life, the aversion to death and destruction, is twinned with a promise of joy which has threatened civilization at every moment" (Ibid., p. 26).

[153] That is the reason way, following Freud, Horkheimer and Adorno can claim that "the history of civilization is the history of the introversion of sacrifice – in other words, the history of renunciation" (ibid., p. 43).

[154] See Ibid., 165. For an excellent explanation of the notion of paranoid projection in Adorno's work, see Baeza, *Contradiction, Critique, and Dialectic in Adorno*, especially chapter 5.

alleged elements of uncivilized nature targeted by fascist violence[155], but also in the absolutisation of reason as the ultimate principle of all reality. More specifically, enlightenment reason objectifies nature by subsuming its chaotic manifold under abstract and universal concepts without reminder, thus forcing whatever appears as alien and qualitatively different into the control oriented mould of a totalitarian system that tolerates nothing outside its reach.[156] While connecting it to the failure of the emancipatory promises of bourgeois revolutions[157], Adorno traces the clearest manifestation of such a process of regression towards an absolutized ego in the philosophical system of the late 18th and 19th century, namely at the climax of what he calls "identity-thinking".[158] With the latter term Adorno means a mode of thinking marked by the pretension that classifying objects under explanatory concepts virtually exhausts the nature of the objects themselves. In this respect, by telling just "what it is an example or representative of"[159], Adorno argues that identity thinking ends up loosing sight of the singularity of its objects, of what he variously calls the non-identical [*das Nichtidentische*] or the non-conceptual [*das Nichtbegriffliche*]. Notoriously, this notion is very difficult to pin down. To make sense of it, we need to take a closer look at Adorno's picture of the relation between the concept and the

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[155] For Horkheimer and Adorno's discussion of the link between the repression of nature and fascist brutality see Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, pp. 139–72.

[156] "Human beings purchase the increase in their power with estrangement from that over which it is exerted. Enlightenment stands in the same relationship to things as the dictator to human beings. […] In their transformation the essence of things is revealed as always the same, a substrate of domination" (Ibid., p. 6) See also Ibid., p.157: "Because paranoiacs perceive the outside world only in so far as it corresponds to their blind purposes, they can only endlessly repeat their own self, which has been alienated from them as an abstract mania. This naked schema of power as such, equally overwhelming toward others and toward a self at odds with itself, seizes whatever comes its way and, wholly disregarding its peculiarity, incorporates it in its mythic web. The closed circle of perpetual sameness becomes a surrogate for omnipotence. It is as if the serpent which told the first humans 'Ye shall be as gods' had kept his promise in the paranoiac. He creates everything in his own image".

[157] Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, pp. 122–26.

[158] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 172. For some helpful commentaries on Adorno's critique of identity thinking see Cook, *Adorno on Nature*, especially pp. 62–90; Dews, "Adorno, Poststructuralism and the Critique of Identity"; Jarvis, *Adorno*, especially pp. 148–74; Thyen, *Negative Dialektik und Erfahrung*.

[159] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 149, Redmond's translation used.

object. But let me first clarify what Adorno understands by the term "object".[160] By the latter Adorno primarily means a cultural product (e.g. a theory, a work of art, a philosophical position) that has accumulated both conceptual and non-conceptual qualities in the course of a natural-historical process – what Adorno calls the "sedimented history"[161] in the object. On the one hand, as is handed down to us, the object acquires explicit and implicit meaning, which add up to the conceptual relations it entertains with other objects in the present historical context. On the other, following his thesis about the "preponderance of the object"[162], Adorno contends that the manners in which an object has been historically articulated *qua* object find its background in a non-conceptual ensemble of bodily engagements and affective experiences describing its original socio-historical context of emergence [*Entstehung*], whose preservation hangs upon the conditions of interpretation marking our modern culture. Contrary to O'Connor's Hegelian reading[163], this non-conceptual core of the object does not represent a latent conceptual content still awaiting an adequate and finite set of concepts to be known. Rather, although its experience cannot escape conceptual mediation *tout court*, the non-conceptual is that resistant component of the object that in principle cannot be fully captured by concepts and discursive tools, but which nonetheless remains essential for the meaningfulness of our experience. Indeed, unless we are able to give voice to the non-conceptual in the object, for Adorno we are left with a reified understanding of our social life, which might be epistemologically valid but cannot grasp the materialist core of objectivity, namely, the non-conceptual substance that has triggered the elaboration of thought in

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[160] The account that follows is strongly indebted to the excellent study of R. Foster. See Foster, *Adorno*, especially pp. 1–30. I have profitably consulted also Baeza, *Contradiction, Critique, and Dialectic in Adorno* and Baeza, "The Normative Role of Negative Affects and Bodily Experience in Adorno" (both these later texts rely extensively on Foster's work). I will discuss what I consider Foster's and Baeza's major shortcomings in the text below.

[161] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 163.

[162] Ibid., p. 192.

[163] O'Connor, "Adorno and the Problem of Givenness".

the first place and still survives in concepts by virtue of the latter's meaning.[164] However, in his view, the conceptual order of identity-thinking "conceals that which thought wants to grasp"[165] by levelling the contradictions and tensions in the object's experiential content. That depends not so much on the appearance of identity […] inherent in thought"[166], as on the historically specific relation modern thought forms maintain with the object, which Adorno argues is modelled after the capitalist exchange principle.[167]

Prima facie, the last claim appears at least debatable, because we know that the instrumental rationality at the core of identity-thinking has a history which goes further way back than the history of capitalism. Nevertheless, Habermas has correctly pointed out that identity thinking acquires its "universal significance" only "through the differentiation of the medium of the exchange value".[168] This view is substantiated by the connection Adorno himself establishes between the transcendental schematism underlying identity-thinking and the logic of commodity exchange in his lectures on *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*.[169] Premised upon a materialist translation of Kant's conception of the relation between the subject and the object into the relation between labour and nature[170], Adorno's reading begins by arguing that in the act of cognition the transcendental subject constructs the identity of the object as the lawfulness of its appearances, which defines the latter's conditions of possibility.[171] The lawfulness of the thing, however, coincides with the unity of consciousness itself, whereby by abstracting from the living and qualitative

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[164] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 12.
[165] Ibid., p. 5.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 146.
[168] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action. Vol. I*, p. 378.
[169] I shall leave to Kant scholars the difficult task of assessing the correctness of Adorno's interpretation.
[170] Adorno*, Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 115.
[171] Ibid., p. 94.

character of things as things objectivity ends up being identical with reification. The invariant and stable structure of the subject is modelled on the self-sameness of the object, while the fixed and stable structure of the object reveals itself as a mere extension of the rigid and immutable structure of the subject. Accordingly, Kant's theory of experience gives unconsciously voice to the "essential antinomy of bourgeois society in general":

> I would now claim that we can interpret this in a radical way as meaning […] that […] the more subjectivization you have, the more reification there is, […] With the growth of subjectivity there is a corresponding growth of reification because thanks to this process of subjectivization the poles of knowledge are drawn further and further apart.[172]

Now, as Lotz sharply underlines[173], the antinomical structure of this objective *Verkehrung* derives from the predominance of the capitalist exchange logic in modern society: the exchange abstraction "turns that which we exchange into the semblance of a thing-in-itself"[174], which is to say into a fixed and reified structure that assumes the constituting role of subjectivity. As "historical *a priori*"[175], then, the schematism with which our conceptual system operates is pre-shaped by the real abstraction of exchange, whereby the philosophical thesis of transcendental subjectivity turns out to be the ideological correlate of the ever-increasing determination of concrete individuals by the administering logic of capitalist society:

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[172] Ibid., pp. 114–15.
[173] Lotz, "Capitalist Schematization", pp. 116–17.
[174] Adorno, "Über Marx und die Grundbegriffe der soziologischen Theorie", p. 507, my translation.
[175] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 171. On this point see also Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy*, p. 59 and Jarvis, *Adorno,* p. 156. Adorno's program of historicizing Kant is clearly indebted to Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*.

> The more individuals are really degraded to functions […], the more […] man as a principle with the attributes of creativity and absolute domination be consoled by exaltation of his mind. […] What shows up faithfully in the doctrine of the transcendental subject is the priority of the relation – […] detached from the human individuals and their relationships – that have their model in exchange. If the exchange form is the standard social structure, its rationality constitutes people; what they are for themselves, what they seem to be to themselves, is secondary.[176]

Contrary to what Baeza maintains[177], however, my claim is that Adorno's ultimate explanation of the pathological nature of this ideological exaltation of the mind does not confirm the determinacy of the modern relationship between the concept and the object, but rather undermines the historical specificity of his own account. Indeed, if he regards Kant's phenomenal world as the disenchanted product of modern rationality, Adorno further contends that this familiar and knowable world is constructed upon the same mechanism of repression of nature he sees at the root of the process of civilization. Thus, the transcendental structure of conceptuality at the centre of Kant's text appears in Adorno's eyes just as a self-standing, delusionary system, which results form the exaltation of mind as a pathological mechanism of defence against a world we have constituted but at the same time we experience as alienated, meaningless, obscure, and despairful: "The demystification or disenchantment of the world […] is identical with a consciousness of being locked out, of a darkness in which we are enclosed".[178] Put differently, for Adorno, what the surreptitious idealism of Kant's philosophy conceals is its non-conceptual origin in the socio-historical experience of modern disenchantment as a withering force that deepens our estrangement from nature, thereby irrationally undermining any

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[176] Adorno, "Subject and Object", p. 141, text amended.
[177] Baeza, *Contradiction, Critique and Dialectic in Adorno*, p. 364.
[178] Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. 110–11.

perspective of a rational order in which we could satisfy our ancestral impulse of reconciling ourselves with both external and internal nature. More generally, Adorno maintains that modern thought forms are reflective of a paranoid projection of nature as a threatening other, which returns from without in the form of a reified reality where the modern process of disenchantment merges with the inexorable rise of capitalism. This means that our conceptual apparatus represents a rationalization of humanity's alienation from nature, whose experience finds its expression at the level of individuals' suffering, anxiety, and "metaphysical despair".[179] These affects give voice to the objective qualities of the socio-historical context of the object's emergence, namely to the sorrowful disfigurement of experience through the logic of disenchantment as it is actualized in our somatic encounter with the object itself. As we shall see in much greater detail below, in fact, for Adorno our experience of the object is not exhausted by conceptual cognition, but rather involves a bodily addendum [*das Hinzutretende*] – "something conveyed to reason and qualitatively different from it".[180] Since consciousness "belongs a priori to the same sphere as the given thing"[181] –, the relation between consciousness and the world cannot be reduced to a conceptually mediated one. To the contrary, it also bears somatic deliverances opposed to the abstract and delusive distortions of the mind, in which the affective dimension of the non-conceptual substance of the object makes itself felt as corporeal suffering in the subject, an intolerable pain that risks to remain unheard unless brought to awareness by the critical endeavours of philosophy itself:

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[179] Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 111.

[180] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 229.

[181] Ibid., p. 196. See also Ibid., 202 where Adorno claims that all mental things are just "modified physical impulses".

> Emphatic philosophy […] [must make good] its attempt to comprehend the non-
> conceptual. […] There is such a thing as societal repression, and one of the organs of the
> philosophically inclined […] is the ability to sense something of this repression, to sense
> what has been repressed in certain objects by the general consciousness.[182]

In sum, on Adorno's view, there is a mutually reinforcing co-determination between the abstract social structures of late capitalism and the identificatory forms of the enlightenment instrumental reason: while the predominance of the exchange principle represents the condition of possibility for the universal and boundless extension of identity-thinking, the latter buttresses the ideological spell of the capitalist totality by liquidating the non-conceptual dimension of the object[183], namely the socio-historical experience of suffering entailed in the modern process of disenchantment as a mechanism of repression that seems to definitively thwart the original promise of reconciliation with nature.

Now, at first glance, one might detect a remarkable consonance between Adorno's conclusions on the reciprocal entanglement of reason with domination and Foucault's philosophical discourse about reason in his genealogical studies of the 1970s. This depends on the fact that their reflections are prompted by the same preoccupation with "the question of the Enlightenment": indeed, as we have already seen in the Introduction, Foucault notes that the tradition of the French history of the sciences – to which he claims his thought belongs – and German critical theory share a common concern with a reason "whose structural autonomy carries the history of dogmatisms and despotisms along with it".[184] Despite the resonance of their intents, however, here

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[182] Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, pp. 68–70.
[183] Recently Hulatt has drawn attention to the "increasingly tightening feedback loop" between the identity thinking form of consciousness and the social structures of capitalism. In my opinion, however, his account wrongly inverts their relationship, making the social structures dependent on identificatory thought (see. Hulatt, "Sub-abstract Bodies", pp. 461–62).
[184] Foucault, "Life: Experience and Science", p. 469.

it is important to stress two crucial differences separating Foucault's account from Adorno's: (1) Foucault's pluralist and empirical approach to the question of rationality and (2) his methodological disapproval of the notion of ideology. Let me examine these two points in turn.

Adorno's critique of enlightenment rationality finds its ultimate target in the reifying effects of social and cultural sciences determined by the intrusion into these spheres of the positivist operations of natural sciences, whose instrumental logic paradigmatically expresses Western reason per se in its attempts to reduce the world to a commensurable and manipulable object. As a result, for Adorno, there is a direct link connecting reification and the world-historical process of advancement of rationalization as it is motivated by the pursuit of self-preservation. The evident weakness deriving from this theoretical move consists in the fact that Adorno ends up presenting us with a one-sided account of history, according to which the successive modes of domination (tribal, monarchical, market-capitalist, and administered-capitalist) as well as "modes of apprehension"[185] of the world (mimetic, mythic, metaphysical, and positivist) are read as mere manifestations of the same original attempt of human beings to subjugate nature and the corresponding mechanism of paranoid repression associated with the purposive form of Western rationality. To state it differently, Adorno's reflections seem to remain confined within the strictures of a philosophy of history that describes the monolinear trajectory of a monolithic instrumental reason, thereby being unable to fully address the historical emergence of specific sciences or, more generally, the conditions of intelligibility of particular discursive formations, not to speak about the dynamic plurality of relations they entertain with their social and political contexts as well as the different practices of

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[185] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Cumming, p. 6.

self-constitution they entail.[186] To the contrary, since his archaeological inquiries of the 1960s, Foucault is engaged in a project of eventualization [*événementialisation*] of history, which replaces transhistorical narratives of Western civilisation with a finer-grained analysis of the historical relations between multiple forms of rationality and local practices. Indeed, for Foucault, the terms "rationality" always designates historical regimes made up of dispersed institutional arrangements, discursive procedures, and social practices, whose strategies are studied "according to two axes: on the one hand, that of codification/prescription […] and on the other, that of true or false formulation".[187] As he clarifies, then, for Foucault it is not a matter of assessing from the vantage point of moral reason the unique moment of bifurcation "at which reason would have lost sight of its fundamental project, or even a point at which the rational becomes the irrational".[188] Foucault's point, instead, is to examine the ramifications of reason in terms of the historically discontinuous relations between systems of power and types of knowledge, without putting reason itself on trial or falling prey to the sterile dichotomy of rationalism and irrationality.[189] In brief, on my view, the advantage of Foucault's genealogical project consists in a thorough historicization of reason, which enables him to map its fragmented proliferation within the series of diverse processes of knowledge and power at the basis of the historical fabrication of the subject.

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[186] See also Dean, *Critical and Effective Histories*, pp. 103–09.

[187] Foucault, "Questions of Method", p. 230.

[188] Foucault, "Structuralism and Post-structuralism", p. 443.

[189] Accordingly, Foucault's approach can be articulated along three interrelated axes: (1) a critical analysis of regional processes of rationalization, "each of them grounded in a fundamental experience" like illness, madness, crime, sexuality, etc. (2) The displacement of the centrality of Enlightenment as the most important epoch of our history in favour of the examination of more remote processes, which would help us "understand how we have been trapped in our own history". (3) An empirical, practical, and present-oriented approach to the history of rationality that excludes the "dangerous" notion of rationalization in order to discover "which kind of [specific] rationality is used" in a given time (Foucault, "'*Omnes et Singulatim*'", pp. 299–300).

As Foucault himself repeatedly underlines, this approach can be hardly captured in terms of the Marxist analysis of ideology. From his viewpoint, in fact, Marxist *Ideologiekritik* is grounded upon three highly contentious premises. Firstly, it presupposes the idea that ideology distorts a truer knowledge we ought to liberate, while for Foucault the problem consists "in seeing historically how effects of truth are produced within discourses which in themselves are neither true nor false". Secondly, the theory of ideology reproduces the deceptive primacy of the constitutive consciousness and of the freedom of the will, which is an integral aspect of the bourgeois-capitalist socialization and of the humanist position. Finally, pitting the economic base against the political super-structure, *Ideologiekritik* provides a merely functionalist account of power, whereby power itself comes to be described only by reference to the economic processes running throughout the social corpus.[190] This does not mean that Foucault denies the existence of "great machineries of power marked by the production of ideology".[191] During his earlier genealogical period, he even provides us with a more or less unwitting picture of the state as a quasi-ideological instance of power, according to which the state does not configure itself as a mere macro-transposition of specific relations of domination, but rather ensures a juridico-institutional codification of the disciplinary mechanisms of power at the basis of its functioning.[192] Nonetheless, at this level of his theoretical production, Foucault's remarks remains underdeveloped: instead of genealogically showing that

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[190] Foucault, "Truth and Power", p. 118.

[191] Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, p. 33, translation amended.

[192] "The State is superstructural in relation to a whole series of power networks that invest the body, sexuality, the family, kinship, knowledge, technology and so forth. True, these networks stand in a conditioning-conditioned relationship to a kind of 'meta-power' [...] but this meta-power with its prohibitions can only [...] secure its footing where it is rooted in a whole series of multiple and indefinite power relations that supply the necessary basis for the great negative forms of power" (Foucault, "Truth and Power", p. 122). The conditioned-conditioning relation between the state and disciplines implies that, while the cohesive function of disciplines is integrated within the global strategies of the state, changes at the level of the micro-tactics of power often bring about strategic transformations, without nevertheless implying that there be a necessary correlation between these two processes as testified by the transposition of techniques of power from one context to another.

the macro-structures of the state are just "the more or less systematic (re)production of micro-practices"[193] of power, he just relegates the juridical and institutional apparatuses of the state to mere smokescreens for the disciplinary techniques of subjection, without being able to account for the ideological mechanisms regulating the latter's codification within the global and hegemonic design of the Leviathan. That depends upon Foucault's rejection of *any* analysis conducted in terms of ideology, ultimately motivated by the conviction that "at the point where networks of power culminate" it is necessary to grasp "much less and much more"[194]: the structural enmeshing of the exercise of power with the formation of apparatuses of knowledge that identify in individual bodies the ultimate target of subjection. To state it otherwise, seeing in the notion of ideology the idealist division between error and a supposedly universal truth in the hands of the intellectual, Foucault ends up opposing to the series "universal category – humanist position – ideological analysis and reform program" his own sequence, namely "refusal of universals – anti-humanist position – technological analysis of mechanisms of power and, instead of reform program: further extend points of non-acceptance".[195] Confronted with the traditional model of ideology as false consciousness, this theoretical pivot clearly assures Foucault a deeper capacity of insight into the question of how domination works and how discourses commonly held as true actually serve existing relations of power. Nevertheless, it seems to me that his reduction of ideology to a matter of false beliefs looses sight of other subtler accounts of ideology, which are not restricted to the analysis of the cognitive aspect of distortion per se but rather explore the functional role played by ideology in sustaining contemporary mechanisms of social domination. In this respect, my suggestion is that it might be profitable to turn to

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[193] Lemke, *Eine Kritik der politischen Vernunft*, p. 124.
[194] Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, p. 33.
[195] Foucault, *On the Government of the Living*, p. 80.

Adorno's work in the search of valuable arguments about the ways in which ideology reinforces current forms of domination, at least to the extent that Adorno dispenses with the cognitive conception of ideology as false consciousness. To this end, we need to recall Adorno's interpretation of Kant's transcendental schematism. According to his reading, the schematism of consciousness turns out to be the ideological product of the real abstraction occurring in capitalist exchange. As we have seen, this means that the ideological function of modern thought forms is reflective of the fetishism of abstract exchange as "an objective process […] – independent from the consciousness of the individuals and their wills".[196] That is the reason why, already in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno can claim that

> Kant intuitively anticipated what Hollywood has consciously put into practice; images
> are precensored during production by the same standard of understanding which will
> later determine their reception by viewers.[197]

As a result, for Adorno, culture industry is first of all an *industry* responsible for the production of our reified consciousness, which binds us to the allegedly unassailable evidence that the current arrangement cannot be modified.[198] Indeed, culture industry

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[196] Adorno, "Über Marx und die Grundbegriffe der soziologischen Theorie", p. 508, emphasis added.
[197] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 65.
[198] "Ideology becomes the emphatic and systematic proclamation of what is. Through its inherent tendency to adopt the tone of the factual report, the culture industry makes itself the irrefutable prophet of the existing order" (Ibid., p. 118). Although the common stress put on the industrial character of culture industry might suggest exactly the opposite impression, the point I would like to make here is different from the reading of someone like Jameson. In *Late Marxism*, Jameson claims that Adorno's theory of culture industry "is not a theory of culture but the theory of an *industry*, of a branch of the interlocking monopolies of late capitalism that makes money out of what used to be called culture" (ibid, p. 144). Such a claim, though, is misguided. Since he fails to properly analyse the mechanisms of industrialization of human abilities at the basis of contemporary capitalism, Adorno never explains how the ideological structures marking late modern culture are connected to the system of production. Moreover, even if he had offered such an explanation, Adorno's sociological investigations of the Hollywood system, advertising, music, design, and norms of behaviour (e.g. ways of greeting) – just to cite few examples – could hardly be reduced to a mere account of the historical emergence of the

fosters the global expansion of the positivist version of contemporary ideology, which is grounded in the very content of self-preservation, namely that "what ought to be is what is anyway".[199] As he clarifies in his 1954 essay "Beitrag zur Ideologienlehre", with positivism the critical division between what is and what should be is eradicated, whereby "ideology scarcely says anything more than that the things are the way they are, even its own untruth dwindles into the weak axiom that things could not be other than what they are".[200] Paradoxically, then, positivist ideology "is no longer added to things as a vindication or complement", but rather "reality becomes its own ideology through the spell cast by its faithful duplication".[201] In other terms, life becomes the "ideology of reification – a death mask" and the material process of production "finally unveils itself as that which it always was […]: ideology". "Today ideology means society as appearance"[202], where the "pseudo-realism" of culture industry's standardized and stereotypical products render "existence itself a substitute for meaning and right".[203] This implies that "in the open-air prison which the world is becoming […] there are no more ideologies in the authentic sense of false consciousness".[204] Despite the apparent variety of items on offer, culture industry equally affects both low and high culture[205], manufacturing "only advertisements for the world through its duplication and the provocative lie which does not seek belief

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contemporary industries of mass cultural production and distribution. Rather, as pointed out in the main text, Adorno's studies cut much deeper, trying to show how individuals' reified consciousness is moulded by the ideological type of culture promoted in advanced capitalist societies.

[199] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 349.

[200] Adorno, "Beitrag zur Ideologienlehre", p. 477, my translation. A current example of this acclamation of the existing state of affairs might be retrieved in the neoliberal principle of the TINA, i.e. "There Is No Alternative".

[201] Adorno, "The Schema of Mass Culture", p. 63.

[202] Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society", pp. 206–07.

[203] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Cumming, p. 148.

[204] Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society", p. 210.

[205] Although he sometimes points to the subversive role classism too, Adorno locates the main exceptions to this trend in modern avant-garde art – for instance, in the music of the Second Viennese School, the art of Picasso, and Beckett's work. For an insightful and rich analysis of the debate surrounding Adorno's politics of culture see Hammer, *Adorno and the Political*, chapter 4.

but commands silence".[206] In other terms, being functionally integrated in the oppressive state of affairs, "ideology drones, as it were, from the gears of an irresistible *praxis*"[207], without implying any false belief about its connection to the prevailing socio-economic structures. Yet, for Adorno, an element of delusion still remains. Indeed, if the new positivist ideology vehicled by culture industry replicates the existing reality at face-value, ideology also objectifies it as natural and unchangeable: thanks to its compensatory and manipulative force, culture industry shapes individuals' needs, desires, aspirations, and thoughts so as to adapt them to the false need-projections and value orientations that the capitalist market conveys through films, radio, magazines, and television, as well as through political and educational institutions, thereby blurring under the appearance of immediate preferences the true interests individuals might pursue within an alternative society.[208] Adorno's eagerness to have done with the dimension of false consciousness, however, draws him too far: instead of investigating the ideological role played by specific institutional arrangements, Adorno ends up to overinflate the notion of ideology, turning it in a top-down, all-catching power one can scarcely see through.[209] To summarize, therefore, while Adorno is concerned with the study of the ideological nature of the positivist thought shoring the universal predominance of the capitalist exchange principle, Foucault's genealogical analytics discharges the notion of ideology to examine the material mechanisms of subjection of individual bodies, which lie at the root of the modern forms of disciplinary power.

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[206] Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society", p. 210.

[207] Ibid., p. 206.

[208] In this sense, Adorno rejects the traditional division between base and superstructure advocated by orthodox Marxists, since "it lags behind a condition in which not only the machineries of production, distribution, and domination, but economic and social relations and ideologies are inextricably interwoven, and in which living people have become bits of ideology" (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 268). For a much more in-depth discussion of the notion of "interest" see Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical* Theory, chapter 2.

[209] For a stronger version of this allegation which excludes any form of resistance see Rehmann, *Theories of Ideology*, pp. 94–5.

Conclusion

This chapter was a primary investigation of Adorno's and Foucault's critiques of our modern social world. My fundamental claim was that the divergence between Adorno's account of domination as grounded in exchange relations and Foucault's early genealogical analytics of power as a multiple cluster of local tactics of domination is attenuated by the common, remarkable emphasis they place on the productive nature of power, according to which modern individuals are the normalized product of the entwinement of disciplinary practices of subjection with the discursive formations and ideological structures marking enlightenment rationality. However, our critical reconstruction cannot stop here. Indeed, if so far we have juxtaposed Adorno's social theory with Foucault's inquiries about disciplines, we need now to engage in a second comparison, which brings into consideration Foucault's later studies on biopower and governmentality. It is to this task that I shall turn next.

Chapter 2

Biopolitics

The present chapter will continue my comparison of Adorno's and Foucault's reflections on the nature of modern society. It will be composed of three sections. After reviewing Foucault's "discovery" of modern biopower, Section 1 will clarify the relationship of mutual reinforcement Foucault sees at play between biopower on the one hand and the development of modern capitalism on the other. This will enable me to point out the remarkable convergence of Foucault's analyses with a still overlooked aspect of Adorno's theory, i.e. the biopolitical profile of his picture of social domination. Despite this resonance, I shall claim that Adorno is far less concerned with the study of the bio-economic procedures marking the social and state organisation of capitalist exploitation than with the explanation of the negative effects biopolitical reification has on human experience, which I shall examine in some detail. The section will close by analysing what role the discovery of biopower played in the shift from Foucault's early polemological conception of power to his later reformulation of it in terms of government. Section 2, then, will be mainly concerned with Foucault's study of the notion of government, where I shall reconstruct the genealogical trajectory he draws from the Christian pastorate to the liberal regime of governmentality passing through the modern art of *raison d'État* (reason of state). Finally, after clarifying the theoretical shifts occasioned by the project of a history of governmentality with respect to his three notions of the subject, freedom, and truth, Section 3 will explore Foucault's portrait of the governmental regime of liberalism. This will lead me to compare Foucault's reflections on liberal freedom as a specific mode of subjec(tiva)tion and Adorno's view of (positive) freedom as an ideological

function of the all-pervasive system of the capitalist totality, whose wrongness lies at the root of the impossibility of conducting a right form of living that would put an end to social suffering. The section will then conclude by arguing that whereas the relevance of Adorno's analyses remains largely confined to the fordist regime marking the welfare states in the first half of the 20th century, Foucault's genealogical reconstruction of German ordoliberalism and American neoliberalism sheds an instructive light on the flexible and securitarian mechanisms of contemporary forms of biopolitical government, which represent the ultimate configuration of the individualizing and totalizing features of modern power.

1. Biopower and Capitalism

As we have seen in Chapter 1, against its juridico-negative conception, Foucault elaborates a positive model of modern power as an array of nonegalitarian and mobile relations between strategic forces responsible for the production of discursive effects of truth, which in turn structurally reinforce its exercise.[1] During the first half of the 1970s, this model follows what Foucault calls the "Nietzsche-hypothesis"[2], according to which with the emergence of the bourgeois-capitalist society the dynamics of functioning of the army are transposed into the productive mechanisms of disciplinary power.[3] By the mid-1970s, however, Foucault becomes sceptical about

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[1] My problem is this […] what type of power is susceptible of producing discourses of truth that in a society such as ours are endowed with such potent effects? […] In a society such as ours, but basically in any society, […] there can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association. We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth" (Foucault, "Two Lectures", p. 93, translation amended).

[2] Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, p. 16.

[3] "In the great eighteenth-century states, the army guaranteed civil peace no doubt because it was a real force, an ever-threatening sword, but also because it was a technique and a body of knowledge that could project their schema over the social body" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 168. See also Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, pp. 15–6). Unlike archaeology, Foucault claims, the "point of reference" of genealogy is no longer "the great model of language [*langue*] and signs, but that of war and battle. The history which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of a language" (Foucault, "Truth and Power", p. 114).

the effectiveness of his polemological conception of power for a correct comprehension of this phenomenon in modern societies. Such uncertainty is the result of Foucault's awareness that from the perspective of the war-like model of power the "Reich-hypothesis" (power as repression) and the "Nietzsche-hypothesis" (power as conflict between opposing forces) appear to be connected to one another, repression being the political consequence of war itself.[4] The suspicions Foucault has long had about the inadequacy of the concept of repression to characterize the nature of modern power, therefore, begin to cast their shadow also onto the idea of power as war, whereby "the twin notions of 'repression' and 'war' have to be considerably modified and ultimately, perhaps, abandoned".[5] Consequently, as I shall show below, Foucault seeks to trace a genealogy of the Nietzsche-hypothesis, which leads him not only to alter his framework of inquiry but also to discover a further change in the configuration of modern power, namely the appearance of what he famously calls "biopower".

According to his genealogical reconstruction, the historical discourses that conceptualise politics in terms of war emerge for the first time in the 17th century. All of them share the same ethnic-racial picture of power as the result of a counter-history of permanent struggles between two hostile races or classes, a perspective that stands in opposition to the legitimising narrative of monarchic sovereignty. For Foucault, then, the historical theme of war is characterized from the start by a common polemical target and by a certain tactical polyvalence, which allows its transposition into a series of different discourses, from its initial employment in the French aristocracy's struggle for its declining prestige to its bourgeois inflection and its appropriation by Marxist-inspired social movements of liberation in the 19th

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[4] Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, p. 16.
[5] Ibid., p. 17.

century. Foucault's attention, however, focuses on the last significant transformation of the polemological view of power, which finds its expression in the theory and practice of that specific *dispositif* of power represented by 19th century state racism. Through a biological and medical naturalisation of the notion of race, in fact, racism replaces the binary conception of society with a biologically monist portrait of society as threatened by a sub-race of dangerous elements (abnormal and deviant subjects, for example), whereby the state becomes the guardian of social integrity, a role terribly exemplified in the totalitarianisms of the 20th century.[6] Now, Foucault's claim is that this transformation can occur only thanks to a broader political change in the framework of power technologies, namely the emergence since the 17th century of biopower.[7] By the term "biopower" Foucault means the general form of modern power, whose aim is to govern and cultivate life by rendering it the target of its explicit calculations. While the ancient sovereign power was grounded on the "right to *take* life and *let* live", with biopower this right is "replaced by the power to *foster* life or *disallow* it to the point of death"[8], whereby the "threshold of modernity" of a society is reached only "when the life of the species is wagered on its own political strategies".[9] Hence, the modern state witnesses the juxtaposition of two different technologies of power: the first one (biopower) grounded in a bio-medical power-

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[6] As far as the Soviet Union is concerned, Foucault's conclusions might appear controversial. Still, besides Nazi racism, Foucault claims there is also a form of Soviet state racism, according to which "what revolutionary discourse designated as the class enemy becomes a sort of biological threat. So, who is the class enemy now? Well, it's the sick, the deviant, the madman. As a result, the weapon that was once used in the struggle against the class enemy (the weapon of war, or possibly the dialectic and conviction) is now wielded by a medical police which eliminates class enemies as though they were racial enemies" (Ibid., p. 83).

[7] Ibid., pp. 239–64.

[8] Foucault, *History of Sexuality 1*, p. 138.

[9] Ibid., p. 143. In contrast to some contemporary readings – according to which biopower is either the hidden meaning of all types of power from the ancient world to the present (see Agamben, *Homo Sacer*) or the all-pervasive and omnipotent power of control exercised by the obscure, global empire of capitalist corporations (see Hardt and Negri, *Empire*) –, for Foucault the historical context of this modification of the relationship between power, life, and death is a very precise one, being identified with an epoch in which the pressure of death upon life ceases to be so strong thanks to the economic development, the reduced morbidity, the demographic growth, and the increase in productivity as well as scientific knowledge about life processes.

knowledge nexus and the second one (the ancient but still persisting sovereign power) mainly concerned with individuals *qua* subjects of right.

Foucault, however, further complicates such a bipolar diagram by distinguishing between the application of disciplines to the individual body-organism and a new political aspect, i.e. the biopolitical regulation of the population. More specifically, Foucault spots three points of demarcation between the disciplinary and the biopolitical technologies composing the all-encompassing system of biopower: (1) The aim: whereas disciplines target individual bodies to ensure the maximal combination of economic utility and political subjection, biopolitics is concerned with the regulation of population as an independent, biological entity. (2) The locus: disciplines find their development in specific institutions (armies, hospitals, schools, etc.), while the biopolitical control of the population is an essential prerogative of state power.[10] (3) The tools: biopower replaces disciplinary training and surveillance with regulation and control, which aim to achieve "an overall equilibrium that protects the security of the whole from internal dangers".[11] Contrary to what Dean suggests[12], however, for Foucault this distinction between a disciplinary anatomo-politics of the human body and a biopolitics of the human race has only a heuristic function. From both an analytical and a historical perspective disciplines and biopower are two sides of a unified rationality of power.[13] According to Foucault, their connection is guaranteed by a newly defined notion of "norm", which is "applied to the body and population alike". Indeed, whereas in disciplinary power the norm is imposed over individuals to assess their normality, in biopower the norm is

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[10] Among the objects of the biopolitical measures adopted by the modern state Foucault includes such wide-ranged phenomena as the rates of fertility and mortality, the longevity of the population, the production and circulation of wealth, the public hygiene and the medical fight against epidemic and endemic diseases, social security against ageing and accidents, the relationship between human beings and their natural as well as urban environment.

[11] Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, p. 249.

[12] Dean, *The Signature of* Power, p. 36.

[13] Foucault, *History of Sexuality 1*, p. 139.

established statistically through the examination of the collective patterns described by the regularities of the population. Foucault, therefore, can claim that what biopower gives birth to is not "a sort of generalized disciplinary society" but rather a "normalizing society", in which power takes hold of life by "covering the whole surface that lies [...] between body and population".[14] As Foucault explains, this connection is crucially actualized in the 19th century *dispositif* of sexuality.[15] On the one hand, sexuality describes "the stamp of individuality" suspected to underlie every mode of behaviour, word, or dream, therefore being in need of constant surveillance. On the other hand, sexuality also becomes "the theme of political operations, economic interventions (through incitements to or curbs on procreation), and ideological campaigns for raising standards of morality and responsibility" in the life of the population as a whole.[16] That is the reason why in the 19th century medical-hygienical knowledge is turned into a "political intervention-technique".[17] Translating social questions into purely therapeutical-technical concepts, medicine takes care not only of individuals but also of the life of the species, since an irregular sexuality is seen as a potential source of degeneration for the population's "biological vigour" and "political energy".[18] As Foucault argues in *The Will to Knowledge*, this means that sexuality is not a supposedly repressed, natural dimension of human beings but rather the product of historically determined power mechanisms and knowledge strategies. Accordingly, sex is not the psychological and material basis of the *dispositif* of sexuality but rather its main effect, whose function is that of reversing the relationship between power and sexuality itself: sexuality appears to be rooted in

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[14] Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, pp. 252–53.
[15] Ibid., p. 251–52. See also Foucault, "The Mesh of Power".
[16] Foucault, *History of Sexuality 1*, p. 146.
[17] Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, p. 252.
[18] Foucault, *History of Sexuality 1*, p. 146.

the secret instance of sex[19], while power itself is conceived of only in terms of law and taboo, thus obscuring how sex itself is produced by means of a polymorphous discursive incitement geared to shape individuals' truthful identity. This implies that, if there are prohibitions, these end up being reallocated within wider practices of power, whose essential objective is "to permit and require individuals to increase their efficiency, their strength, their aptitudes"[20], in brief everything that allows their subjection to the constraining imperatives of social production and reproduction. The biopolitical *dispositif* of sexuality, then, has not only a political functionality but also an economic one, whereby Foucault points to the close correlation between biopower and the development of modern capitalism:

> This biopower was without question an indispensable element in the development of capitalism; the latter would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes. [21]

Again, here, Foucault's and Adorno's diagnoses show an astounding resonance, which so far has passed largely unnoticed. As a preliminary step to corroborate my claim, I shall review Foucault's account of the embeddedness of biopower in capitalist economy. After clarifying the biopolitical profile of Adorno's picture of social domination, then, I shall illustrate the convergence of their analyses on the crucial connection between the rise of the capitalist economy and the configuration assumed by modern power as an ensemble of apparatuses in charge of the fabrication of the living. Finally, the section will juxtapose Adorno's monolithic account of

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[19] Ibid., p. 154.
[20] Foucault, "Sexuality and Power", p. 128.
[21] Foucault, *History of Sexuality 1*, pp. 140–41.

biopolitical domination against Foucault's differential approach, pointing to the theoretical shifts determined by the discovery of the double-layered structure of biopower in Foucault's own conception of power relations. The historical juncture linking biopower and capitalism provides Foucault with a confirmation of the necessity to rethink the nature of power: detached from the negative mechanisms of state politics, modern power turns positive by becoming ever more intertwined with the realm of the economy, where the latter's field is extended to include not only the exchange of commodities but the administration of life and the exploitation of bodily forces.[22] In this sense, although he rejects the identification of labour with the "concrete essence" of man and the reference to the notion of class looses its centrality, Foucault's work owes a profound debt to Marx's reflections.[23] More specifically, the first element that draws Foucault's attention is the emphasis of Marx's analysis on the mutual implication between economic exploitation and disciplinary coercion. For Foucault (as for Marx), in fact, what ensures the accumulation of capital is the subsumption of the time of life under its valorisation

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[22] In a later text, Foucault stresses the importance of studying the "complex and circular" connection of mechanisms of subjection with mechanisms of exploitation, adding nonetheless the proviso that subjection must be distinguished from exploitation because subjection does not constitute the mere "'terminal' of more fundamental mechanisms" (Foucault, "The Subject and Power", p. 332)

[23] "How may we attempt to analyse power in its positive mechanisms? It appears to me that we may find, in a certain number of texts, the fundamental elements for an analysis of this type. […] We may of course […] find these elements in Marx, essentially in the second volume of *Capital*. It's here, I think, that we may find some elements I will use for the analysis of power in its positive mechanisms" (Foucault, "The Mesh of Power", accessible online at https://viewpointmag.com/2012/09/12/the-mesh-of-power/). Contrary to what Cook wrongly believes (see Cook, "Foucault and Adorno on Power and Exchange", p. 192), here Foucault has in mind not actually *Capital* Volume II but the second volume of Volume I of the French edition of *Capital* (containing sections 4, 5, and 6), which was published by Éditions Sociales. As far as the concept of class is concerned, Foucault recognizes that the bourgeoisie and the proletariat were the targets of different techniques of sexual control. Unlike Marxists, though, he thinks that "the most rigorous techniques were […] applied […], with the greatest intensity, in the economically privileged and politically dominant classes" (Foucault, *History of Sexuality 1*, p. 120). In a later interview, Foucault confirms that the institutionalisation of disciplinary practices is not "foreign to the existence of classes in the Marxist sense of the term", but in any case cannot be reduced to the latter. (Foucault, "Pouvoir et Savoir", p. 403). For interesting comparisons between Marx and Foucault see Balibar, "Foucault and Marx"; Chignola, "Fabbriche del corpo. Foucault, Marx"; and the essays collected in Laval, Paltrinieri, Taylan (ed.), *Marx & Foucault*.

process[24]: the different apparatuses of disciplinary power adapt the generic labour-force of human bodies to the assembly of productive and docile workers, who mistake the historical laws of the capitalist mode of production for unchangeable natural laws. This means that the extraction of surplus-value finds its condition of possibility in the microscopic power of disciplines, which "explores, breaks down, and rearranges" the human body up to its tiniest detail. Re-structuring space and re-organizing time, disciplinary power attaches the body to a functional position and to the repetitiveness of a gesture marked by the force of habit, the pervasiveness of the *dressage*, and the normalizing effect of knowledge, while subordinating its capacities to the demands of production.[25] Disciplines, therefore, play a double role: on the one hand, they guarantee the reproduction and preservation of the relations of production characterizing modern capitalism. On the other hand, "they contribute to their 'continuous creation' by producing productive forces, i.e. subjective dispositions to produce coordinated with the needs of capitalism in terms of exploitation for profit".[26] But what permits the adjustment of the accumulation of men to that of capital is not only this forced kinship between the wage-form and the prison-form.[27] Indeed, that which often goes unnoticed is the remarkable role played by the biopolitical technologies of regulation in the evaluation and administration of the working performance at the collective level.[28] In this sense, the essential prerequisite of the accumulation process is the production of what Marx calls the "industrial

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[24] See Foucault, *The Punitive Society*, pp. 231–32.

[25] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 139 and ff. See also

[26] Legrand, "Le marxisme oublié de Foucault", p. 39, my translation. See also Foucault, "Truth and Juridical Forms", pp. 86–7.

[27] Foucault, *The Punitive Society*, pp. 70–2. By this kinship, Foucault refers to the connection of wage and prison to a disciplinary apparatus of power "that ensures the real extraction of time [from people's lives]" and its introduction into a system of exchanges and measures, according to which "just as the wage rewards the time for which labour-power has been purchased from someone, the penalty corresponds to the infraction, not in terms of reparation or exact adjustment, but in terms of quantity of time of liberty". One might think here of the well-known adage Marx recalls from Fourier: factories as "mitigated jails" (Marx, *Capital. Volume I*, p. 553).

[28] For an exception see Macherey, *Il soggetto produttivo*, especially pp. 62–82.

reserve army"[29] through the regimented insertion of the individuals expelled from the countryside into the urban workplaces, where the pauperized working class is moulded into a mass force subservient to the authoritarian command of the owners of capital. To put it otherwise, whereas it initially affects the individual worker, the extraction of surplus value comes to progressively massify the nature of labour. Supervising the detailed implementation of the owner's commands through the mediation of intermediate authorities, the capitalist exploitation coordinates the cooperative labour between workers according to the technical goals of the capitalist mode of production, while at the same time it disqualifies all those deviant and recalcitrant elements that refuse to abide by the common rules normalizing the manufacturing process. Hence, functioning at the intersection of political and economic power, for Foucault biopower nurtures relations of domination resulting in the social and state organisation of capitalist exploitation, which takes charge not only of the statistical dynamics of the population but also of the health and environment of the working process.[30]

Now, on my view, Foucault's interest in the power mechanisms that allow life to be put to work within the institutions of modern capitalism is paralleled by Adorno's preoccupation with the modern subsumption of all forms life under the sway of capitalist exchange. As the reader may recall, the famous epigraph of the first part of *Minima Moralia* declares that "life does not live".[31] What Adorno means with this apparently paradoxical phrase is that life has been so perverted that living experience can hardly be said to be anything more than the material reproduction of individuals and society itself for capital's own sake. Adorno's diagnosis concerns not only "the

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[29] See Marx, *Capital. Volume I*, chapter 25.
[30] On this point see also Read, *The Micro-Politics of Capital*, p. 141.
[31] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 19 (the epigraph is actually a quotation from Kürnberg's work).

most important medium of all politically effective criticism"[32] once represented by the realm of public life, which has degenerated into a commodified dimension where the public opts for security and adaptation.[33] Rather, if in the bourgeois era it still constituted a bulwark against social determination, today exchange relations contaminate also private life.[34] For Adorno, then, reification structures the social world as a gigantic prison[35] by harnessing individuals to coercively internalized social norms, which shape every aspect of their life so as to adjust it to the capitalist logic of exchange. Far from allegedly endorsing a "philosophy of consciousness" as Habermas claims, this means that Cook is right when she emphasises that Adorno shares Habermas' view that "there is no individuation without sociation".[36] Indeed, Adorno explicitly contends that "society destines the individuals to be what they are even by their *immanent genesis*".[37] What Cook fails to notice, however, is that the reification of the intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions of the individual presupposes the primary process of reification conditioning the relationship the individual itself maintains with its own body.[38] Under the impact of reification, for Adorno, the body is turned into an "object, dead thing, or *corpus*", to a form of bare life [*zoe*] that is not a transcendental figure[39] but rather the historical product of the subordination of human life to the capitalist machinery of the administered world. On his view, examples of this abasing reduction of the individual body to a lifeless corpse can be found in contemporary socio-cultural phenomena like the new sport

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[32] Adorno, "Critique", p. 283.

[33] Adorno, *Vermischte Schriften I*, p. 343, my translation. For a more detailed analysis of this point see Cook, *Adorno, Habermas and the Search for a Rational Society*, pp. 59–60.

[34] Even a *prima facie* non-instrumental, intimate relationship like marriage, for example, reveals itself to be subjugated to the "alienated orders of rights and property" when at the time of divorce the two lovers appear for what they are, namely contracting parties that litigate for the distribution of their assets (see Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, pp. 31–2).

[35] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 346.

[36] Cook, *Adorno, Habermas and the Search for a Rational Society*, p. 45.

[37] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 219, emphasis added.

[38] On the point see also Testa (2013), "Corpus", pp. 154–57.

[39] As in the case of Agamben, *Homo Sacer*.

hygiene or the numbed protagonists of Hollywood films. However, it is with the socio-economic structure of waged-labour that the biopolitical profile of this ossification comes most clearly to the fore. In the fundamental aphorism 147 of *Minima Moralia*, Adorno writes:

> Wage-labour formed the masses of the modern epoch, indeed created the worker himself. As a general principle the individual is not merely the biological basis, but the reflection of the social process; his consciousness of himself as something in-itself is the illusion needed to raise his level of performance, whereas the individuated function in the modern economy as mere agents of the law of value.[40]

The development of modern capitalism affects not only the social role of the individual, but also its inner constitution. Indeed, drawing on Marx's insights, Adorno claims that the growth of the organic composition of capital – which is to say, the growth in the mass of means of production with respect to the mass of labour-power exploited for their employment – has as its correlate an equivalent accretion of the "organic composition" of human beings as socialized individuals, whereby the technological demands of the production process determine subjects themselves as "means of production and not as living purposes".[41] This does not amount to a mere "mechanization" of man, since there is no substantial substratum under the moulding pressure of social forces. Rather, demarcating his position from any nostalgically romantic or reactionary criticism[42], Adorno clarifies that the pathological deformation of life takes shape at the source as it were, namely at society's own level, which

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[40] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, pp. 228–29.
[41] Ibid., p. 229.
[42] "Reactionary criticism often enough attains insight into the decay of individuality and the crisis of society, but places the ontological responsibility for this on the individual as such, as something discrete an internal: for this reason the accusation of shallowness, lack of faith and substance, is the last word it has to say, and return to the past is solace" (Ibid., p. 148).

"begets its children with the 'hereditary taint' that biologism projects on to nature".[43] Put otherwise, by the increase in the organic composition of human beings Adorno refers to the process through which not only man's "specialized technical faculties" but also its "moments of naturalness" are made subservient to the dominant machinery of capitalist production. On the one hand, capitalism transforms individuals into compliant and compulsive consumers, who are "perpetually dissatisfied because what they consume is [just] exchange value".[44] On the other, capitalism fabricates and cultivates individuals' bodily skills, psychological dispositions, and knowledge in order to incorporate them in its valorisation process as a kind of productive lubrication attached to the fixed component of capital.[45] As a result, whereas for Foucault the normalizing function of modern society is exercised in the form of a subjection to the medical or quasi-medical standards vehicled by experts and institutional authorities, Adorno upholds that the social totality requires individuals to mould themselves along the model of deadened things, unhesitatingly adopting normalized behaviours and placing their highest sense of fulfilment in the ostentation of economic status symbols as well as in the identification with narcissistic collectives. Despite this difference, however, there is a substantial point of agreement between the two philosophers: for both Foucault *and* Adorno, "under *a priori* saleability of the living"[46], life becomes the primary target of an immediate process of biopolitical subjection, according to which the organisation of social domination forces the production and coordination of docile and lifeless bodies. Doubtlessly, Adorno is much more concerned with the consequences the increase of the organic composition of individuals has for human experience than with specifying

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[43] Ibid., p. 229.
[44] Tomba, "Adorno's Account of the Anthropological Crisis and the New Type of Human", p. 40.
[45] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 230.
[46] Ibid.

the bio-economic procedures marking the social and state organisation of capitalist exploitation. More specifically, what captures his attention is the link connecting the growth in the organic composition of human beings to a progressive disintegration of individual experience, whereby the latter no longer describes a substantial process of re-elaboration of the past aimed at future realizations [*Erfahrung*], but an endless and discontinuous series of "shocks" [*Erlebnisse*] modelled after the mass experiences of culture industry, the mindless and repetitive activity of factory workers, and last but not least the pre-reflective adaptation of the subject's bodily gestures and habits to the technological configuration of its living milieu.[47] In other words, the growth in the organic composition of individuals manifests itself in the "transition from firm characteristics to push-button behaviour-patterns", whose "quick reactions [...] do not restore spontaneity, but establish the person as a measuring instrument deployed and calibrated by a central authority".[48] Due to the fragmentation of their experiential continuum, then, the representatives of the new "radio generation" can no longer be said to have "their experiences".[49] Rather, what they pass through are pre-determined forms of experience structured according to the transcendental synthesis of the capitalist exchange principle, whereby "any so-called empirical material" is already "pre-digested" by the social totality.[50] Hence, for Adorno, what distinguishes our modern social world is the capacity of the organisation process to shape all forms of

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[47] "Not least to blame for the withering of experience is the fact that things, under the law of pure functionality, assume a form that limits contact with them to mere operation, and tolerates no surplus, either in freedom of conduct or in autonomy of things, which would survive as the core of experience, because it is not consumed by the moment of action" (Ibid., p. 40). Notwithstanding their different conclusions about the destruction of experience in modernity, Adorno is clearly indebted to Benjamin for this distinction between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*. For a helpful comparison of their positions see Morgan, *Adorno's Concept of Life*, pp. 35–8).

[48] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 231.

[49] Adorno, "Individuum und Gesellschaft. Entwürfe und Skizze", p. 65, my translation. The use of communication technologies, for instance, demands constant and prompt responsiveness. The organization of public transport dictates the frantic pace of our daily life. The same is also true for the rigid scheduling of both labour and free time, where the latter has become a mere prolongation of the abstract, linear time of production, during which individuals can improve their dispositions and consequently their degree of productivity.

[50] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, pp. 312–13.

social life, thereby accentuating society's antagonism as well as the divide between the *zoon politikon* and the psychological individual, which in today's administered world reveals itself in terms of a diffused sense of political disengagement. The difference between Adorno's and Foucault's account of the *biopolitical* nature of modern systems of power, however, is not limited to a matter of emphasis. Indeed, the premise of the total subsumption of life under the sway of capitalism leads Adorno to hold that the procedures of social domination apply uniformly both at the level of individual and collective life, creating a homogeneous complex of reification almost devoid of any contradiction. To the contrary, what draws Foucault's attention is the composite character of modern biopower. As we have seen above, its all-encompassing technology involves at the same time the disciplinary dressage of individual bodies and the biopolitical regulation of the efficiency, health, and prosperity of population as a living entity, two components that can hardly be reduced to one another. In this respect, with the discovery of biopower Foucault becomes progressively aware that there is indeed a qualitative shift in the mechanisms of power from the individual to the collective dimension of modern society. This entails two different but interrelated consequences: on the one hand, it suspends the identification of power with disciplinary coercion, which has marked Foucault's account of power so far. On the other, it drives him to discharge the war-like model as the privileged framework to conceptualise power relations. As far as this second consequence is concerned, the following sceptical lines are telling:

> Is the relation between forces in the order of politics a warlike one? I don't personally feel prepared to answer this with a definite yes or no. It just seems to me that the

affirmation, pure and simple, of a 'struggle' can't act as the beginning and end of all explanations in the analysis of power relations.[51]

In other terms, Foucault recognizes that, in so far as power and war coincide, not only is war deprived of both "its collective character and its constitutive link with death"[52], but war itself appears unable to capture the concreteness and heterogeneity of the mechanisms of power. Indeed, like the juridical conception of power, the war-like model is equally incapable of accounting for the productivity and positivity of biopower. That is the reason why since 1978 Foucault abandons the previously advocated war-like model – within which the coercive and domineering effects are paramount – in favour of a redefinition of power in terms of "government". In his 1982 article "The Subject and Power", which can be regarded as his last focused analysis of power after 1976, Foucault clarifies this reconceptualization in the following terms:

> Basically, power is less a confrontation between two adversaries or their mutual engagement than a question of "government". […] The relationship proper to power would therefore be sought not on the side of violence or of struggle, nor on that of voluntary contracts (all of which can, at best, only be the instruments of power) but, rather, in the area of that singular mode of action, *neither warlike nor juridical*, which is government.[53]

Hence, contrary to what Kelly asserts, it seems legitimate to claim that by the end of the 1970s there occurs a remarkable shift in Foucault's theorization of power, which allows him to move beyond the semantic field of will and consent on the one hand

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[51] Foucault, "The Eye of Power", p. 164, text amended.
[52] Sorrentino, *Il pensiero politico di Foucault*, p. 82, my translation.
[53] Foucault, "The Subject and Power", p. 341, emphasis added.

and of domination and war on the other. Indeed, Kelly is misguided when he contends that there is no break, because "war was never taken up by Foucault as a formal model at all".[54] Far from being just "a metaphor Foucault uses tentatively", war is the favoured analytical grid he employs up to the mid-1970s to investigate social relations *both* at their micro- and macro-level in the attempt to construct the "exact opposite"[55] model of the juridico-negative conception of power. Consequently, from my perspective, what Foucault's disavowal of his polemological schema of power amounts to is not a turn from a "strategic perspective on power to […] a micropolitical, relational perspective"[56], but rather the disarticulation of the concept of strategy from the dialectical, binary logic marking the idea of war, which as a mere reversal of the sovereign model remains incapable of explaining "how it is possible that his [the sovereign's] headless body often behaves *as if* it indeed had a head".[57] As Lemke points out, this means that "the concept of government acquires its own profile in a complex play of break and continuity"[58]: on the one hand, the discovery of biopower leads Foucault to drop his earlier account, thus freeing the differentiating perspective of genealogy from the risk of falling prey to the unitarian discourse of war, which tends to relate every power configuration to the organizing principle of discipline. On the other, however, the change of perspective involved in the reformulation of power as government does not result in a return to the juridical model of state power, but rather it represents a refinement of the central insights of his earlier micro-physics of power. To put it briefly, in his later writings Foucault continues to conceive of power as a strategic array of force relations "rooted deeply

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[54] Kelly, *The Political Philosophy of Michel Foucault*, p. 60.
[55] Foucault, "Two Lectures", p. 97.
[56] Kelly, *The Political Philosophy of Michel Foucault*, p. 65. Strangely, Kelly upholds that Lemke defends this position in *Eine Kritik der Politischen Vernunft*, without giving any precise reference. I was not able to retrieve any passage confirming this interpretation.
[57] Dean, *Critical and Effective Histories*, p. 156.
[58] Lemke, *Eine Kritik der Politischen Vernunft*, p. 145, my translation.

in the social nexus"[59], whereby his theoretical question becomes to know whether his non-functionalist, extra-institutional, and non-objectivist analysis can be reemployed within the new project he embarks upon in 1978, that is to say in the elaboration a "genealogy of the state" in terms of the history of the arts of government.

2. Foucault's History of Modern Governmentality

But what does Foucault mean by the term "government"? What is the connection of this new project to the problematic of biopower? And, most importantly, what are its theoretical and political implications for our comparison of Foucault's and Adorno's enterprises? In order to provide a preliminary answer to these questions – on which I shall further elaborate in the next section –, here it is necessary to review the genealogical history of the modern biopolitical *dispositifs* of security Foucault traces in his 1978 course at the Collège de France, stressing in particular his identification of their mode of power with the notion of "governmentality". The concept of government appears for the first time in Foucault's 1978 course on *Security, Territory, Population*, whose main concern is the exposition of the correlation between the birth of biopower and the emergence of what Foucault calls the "*dispositifs* of security" in the 18th century. In order to define their specificity with respect to both the legal system and the mechanisms of disciplinary power, Foucault investigates how these apparatuses deal with four different questions, i.e. (1) the organisation of space, (2) the treatment of aleatory events, (3) the form of normalization, and (4) the reality of population. Let me review them in turn: (1) Space. Demarcating themselves from the idea of a juridically centralized territory upon which sovereign power is exerted and from the architectonic, closed, and

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[59] Foucault, "The Subject and Power", p. 343.

transparent space of disciplines, technologies of security constitute as their field of intervention a milieu, that is to say a complex set of bio-sociological processes and natural phenomena whose laws become the object of a whole series of knowledges regrouped under the general label of political economy.[60] (2) The Uncertain. Dangerous events, such as the scarcity of grain, are no longer regarded as something that must be prevented through direct provisions on prices and exportations, but rather as the effects of the fluctuations of agricultural goods, which should be balanced by fostering the free circulation of cereals and the free evolution of prices.[61] (3) Normalization. While disciplines start by fixing the norms to which the individual has to abide by in order to be counted as normal – so that one should speak of "normation [*normation*] rather than normalization"[62] –, for modern security "the norm is an interplay of different normalities. The normal comes first and the norm is deduced from it".[63] (4) Population. Each of the previous three domains is marked by the centrality of the population, which with the 18th century economists "no longer appears as a collection of subjects of right" subordinated to the laws and regulations of the sovereign's will, but rather "as a set of processes to be managed at the level and on the basis of what is natural in these processes".[64] In other terms, as a complex of human relations and things like wealth, means of subsistence, territory, climate, eventualities, habits, desires, ways of thinking and acting, population is "a datum that depends on a series of variables", which remains therefore opaque to the sovereign's action by eluding its grip. However, its naturalness renders population administrable

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[60] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, pp. 11–23.
[61] Ibid., pp. 29–49.
[62] Ibid., p. 57.
[63] Ibid., p. 63. The control of epidemics, for instance, works not only through the isolation of the sick person (e.g. the lepers during the Middle Ages) or through the pervasive regulation of its behaviour (e.g. the disciplinary treatment of plague in the 16th and 17th century), but primarily through statistical and preventive methods (e.g. the inoculation of smallpox), which allow to keep the general morbidity and mortality within acceptable limits and around an average considered as optimal.
[64] Ibid., p. 70.

and "accessible to agents and techniques of transformation, on the condition that these agents and techniques are at once […] calculated and calculating".[65] In brief, the securitarian apparatuses replace the merely conservative and defensive end of the juridico-disciplinary deployments of sovereignty with the productive goal of assuring and promoting the optimal conditions of subsistence and welfare of a given population, whose members are living, working, and speaking subjects composing a definite and knowable reality. Whereas sovereignty and disciplines take charge of individuals through their exhaustive surveillance, this means that the full autonomy the processes of population attain within the mechanisms of security demands the introduction of a mode of power exercise adequate to the securitarian logic. Foucault initially traces such a form of power in the idea of the *government of men*[66], whose problematic "explodes in the middle of the 16th century" with the multiplication of the practices and agents of government throughout the entire social body.[67] All these phenomena, for Foucault, share a new political rationality, which is defined by the downward and upward continuity between three different arts of government: (1) self-government, which falls under the science of morality; (2) the government of the family, the science of which is economics; and (3) the government of the state, which is the proper object of politics.[68] As suggested by its intermediary position, these two dynamics find their point of intersection in the field of *oikonomia* (i.e. of the prudent, domestic management of the fates and resources of men), whereby the family ends up providing the model for the political activity of government as "the right disposition

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[65] Ibid., pp. 71, text amended.
[66] "While I have been speaking about population a word has constantly recurred – you will say that this was deliberate, but it may not be entirely so – and this is the word 'government'" (Ibid., p. 76).
[67] See Ibid., pp. 87–9.
[68] To state it more explicitly, the idea pervading the literature on government of the time is that only the one who can exercise an upright government over himself will succeed in governing its family and the state, while, conversely, only within a well-run state are individuals encouraged to the good government of their families and of themselves.

of things arranged so as to lead to a suitable end"[69]. Thus, for the first time the economy and the economic prosperity of its citizens become the fundamental preoccupation of state government. This implies that, if like in the ancient epoch the upright governor is required to have wisdom to attain its goals, the object of its knowledge is no longer the sovereign idea of "the common good", but rather the plurality of the things it has to rule and the methods it has to use.[70] As Foucault notes, far from remaining merely abstract, this rationality of government is connected to the development of the great administrations of territorial monarchies, within which an essential role is played by the doctrines and practices associated with the governmental regime of *raison d'État* (reason of state). The latter describes an economy of power oriented to the increase of the greatness and welfare of the state itself. Setting the stage for the further development of biopower in the 18th century, *raison d'État* pursues this aim by way of an integration of the individualizing mechanisms of disciplinary power with the totalizing regulation of population, thus configuring itself as a secular and political version of the ancient idea of pastoral power. Indeed, foreign to the Greek tradition of the *polis,* for Foucault the genealogical antecedent of *raison d'État* should be sought in the Hebraic concept of the pastorate, according to which the relationship between God and his people is compared to that between the shepherd and the flock. In the pre-Christian East, the model of power is that of a shepherd whose task is "to constantly ensure, sustain, and improve the lives"[71] of each and every one of his sheep. Such a form of power, then, reaches the West through the mediation of Christianity, which considerably modifies

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[69] G. La Perrière, *Le Miroir Politique*, as quoted in Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 96.
[70] For the other two qualities the true governor, namely patience (rather than anger) and diligence, see Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, pp. 99–100.
[71] Foucault, "'*Omnes et Singulatim*'", p. 307. This is the text of the two Tanner lectures Foucault delivered at Stanford University in 1979, which provide a helpful summary of some the themes treated in the central lectures of *Security, Territory, Population*.

some of its features.[72] In particular, once institutionalized in the Christian Church, the pastorate becomes a human association in which the role of the shepherd is picked up by the various articulations of ecclesiastical power. This has two major consequences: on the one hand, the relationship of the Christian to the law ends up being reduced to the continuous obedience of each and everyone to the pastor, which implies a virtuous work of mortification of the will geared to the attainment of one's otherworldly salvation. On the other, based upon a "subtle economy of merit and fault"[73], the transformative appropriation of the ancient Hellenistic practices of self-examination and guidance of conscience allows the Christian pastorate to activate a subjecting process of individualization of man, according to which the subject is called to decipher and verbalise its "internal, secret, and hidden truth"[74] *qua* desiring subject. What Christianity thus delineates is "the organization of a link between total obedience, knowledge of oneself, and confession to someone else"[75], whereby pastoral power constitutes itself "as a permanent intervention in everyday conduct [*conduite*], in the management of lives, as well as in goods, wealth, and things".[76] Pastoral power, however, remains distinct from political power up until the 16th century, when the crisis triggered by the struggles for the reformation of the Christian pastorate leads to an overwhelming extension of the latter's art of government outside the ecclesiastical institutions. As a result, pastoral power comes to be integrated into the state, which becomes "a modern matrix of individuation, or a new form of pastoral power".[77]

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[72] See Ibid., pp. 308–11.
[73] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 173.
[74] Ibid., p. 184.
[75] Foucault, "'*Omnes et Singulatim*'", p. 310.
[76] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 154.
[77] Foucault, "The Subject and Power", p. 334.

In this respect, Foucault largely agrees with Adorno overly brief remarks on the historical emergence of individuality as they are presented in his lecture series *History and Freedom*. Attempting to make sense of Hegel's philosophy of history, here Adorno points to the world-historical shift from the ancient to the modern form of individuation. In antiquity, so his argument goes, the category of individuality was the privilege of a few, grounded in the perpetuation of a system of slavery, whereby individuality itself was somehow restricted and associated with the idea of a neat separation from the rest of society. In the bourgeois era, instead, the notion of individuality develops all its potential, driven by the universalism of the Christian doctrine of the absolute value of each and every individual soul and, especially, by the rise of modern capitalism:

> The concept of the individual becomes radical in the modern world […] only when the form of the economy, […] is determined by initiative, by labour, a sense of responsibility, the autonomy of individual human beings standing in a relationship based on exchange.[78]

Accordingly, Adorno can claim that modern history begins in the 16th century with the "discovery" of the individual, whose capacity of oppositional self-reflection vis-à-vis the social authority was fostered by the newly born dynamics of capitalist competition.[79] Nevertheless, Adorno also emphasises the intrinsic heteronomy of this construction, whereby individuation comes progressively to coincide with the process of internalized adaptation to social norms at the root of the opaque and irrational reversal of the means-end relationship marking the capitalist structure of modern society. Adorno's historical reconstruction stops here, though, without further

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[78] Adorno, *History and Freedom*, pp. 85–7.
[79] Ibid., pp. 70–1.

inquiring into the multiple and intricate set of historical conditions at the basis of the emergence of the power mechanisms to be held accountable for the increasing socialization under late capitalism. On the contrary, following the spirit of Weber's enterprise, Foucault investigates how practices originally conceived within Christian institutions have been incorporated in the modern state to build up what Foucault calls its political "'double bind', which is the simultaneous individuation and totalization of modern power structures".[80] In particular, resuming our analysis of his 1978 lectures, Foucault upholds that in the context of *raison d'État* the functions of the Christian pastorate are taken over by one of the two technologies of power contributing to the unfolding of the state's political rationality, i.e. police.[81] According to Foucault, by the early notion of "police" one should not understand a public authority tasked with the repressive prevention of crime, but rather "a set of laws and regulations that concern the interior of a state, which endeavour to strengthen and increase its power, […] and […] to procure the happiness of the subjects".[82] Like the shepherd, police sees not only to the splendour of the state vis-à-vis the other European states, but also to the felicity and welfare of the community, which include "the good of the soul (thanks to religion and morality), the good of the body (food, health, clothing, housing), [and] wealth (industry, trade, labour)". In short, the purpose of the governmental technology of police is "to develop those elements constitutive of individuals' lives in such a way that their development also fosters the strength of the state".[83] Hence, marked by what Oestreich calls a medico-

[80] Foucault, "The Subject and Power", p. 336.
[81] The second one is the diplomatic-military system, which Foucault explores in Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, lecture of March 22nd 1978.
[82] J. H. G. von Justi, *Grundsätze der Policey-Wissenschaft*, as quoted in Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 327.
[83] Foucault, "*Omnes et Singulatim*'", p. 321–22.

sanitarian "regulation mania"[84], police concerns living and prefigures the complete development of biopower in the 18th century. As Marzocca has pointed out[85], this often-neglected historical connection between police and biopower helps us to clarify a crucial conceptual point. Since its inception through the activity of police, biopower cannot be reduced either to Agamben's idea of a grip of biopower on "bare life" or to Esposito's "immunitarian" paradigm.[86] If "with police there is a circle that starts from the state as a power of rational and calculated intervention on the individuals and comes back to the state as a growing set of forces", for Foucault "this circle passes through the life of individuals, but it also passes through their *more than just living*, that is to say through what at the time was called men's convenience [*commodité*], their amenity, or even felicity".[87] Contrary to what the majority of commentators maintains[88], then, the contours of the governmental framework in which biopolitics inscribes itself are not limited to those of a mere power over the biological necessities of life, but rather extend themselves to include almost all aspects of life. However, it is my contention that, by overemphasising the continuity between the governmental regime of *raison d'État* as embodied in the administrative activity of police on the one hand and the affirmation of biopower on the other, Marzocca ends up blurring the historical as well as political implications of the main theoretical concern of Foucault's 1978 course, namely "the unblocking of the art of government" in the 18th century.[89] Indeed, whereas the early mercantilist art of government of the 16th and

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[84] Oestreich, *Neostoicism and the Early Modern State*, p. 157.
[85] O. Marzocca, *Perché il governo*, p. 104.
[86] See for instance, Esposito, *Bíos*.
[87] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 327.
[88] See, for example, Gros, "Y a-t-il un sujet biopolitique ?"; Lemke, *Eine Kritik der Politischen Vernunft*, p. 134–39; Read, *The Micro-Politics of Capital*, p. 147.
[89] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 103. Strangely, Amy Allen's review of Foucault's account of technologies of domination fails to take into consideration this further shift in the modern arts of government, thereby extending Foucault's reflections on the early science of police [*Polizeiwissenschaft*] to cover contemporary economies power. Thus, as will become clear by my

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17th century still takes "the sovereign's might as its essential objective"[90] and the family as the model of economic management, during the 18th century the emergence of the problem of population and the re-qualification of the family as a tool of political economy produce a radical transformation of the modern science of government, whose technologies can finally be "released", as it were, from the juridico-disciplinary constraints still conditioning the doctrines of *raison d'État*. As a result, according to Foucault, the 18th century witnesses the birth of a new political rationality, according to which population no longer appears as the sovereign's strength but rather as "the end and instrument of government", as a "subject of needs and aspirations" whose dynamics are to be optimized in order to "increase its wealth, its longevity, and its health".[91] That is the reason why Foucault notes that a more accurate title for his 1978 course would have been "a history of 'governmentality'", where the latter term means primarily

> the ensemble of institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instruments.[92]

For Foucault, therefore, the distinctive trait of modernity is not the "state's take over [*étatisation*] of society, so much as […] the 'governmentalization' of the state"[93], according to which the state itself is nothing other but "an episode [*péripétie*]" of

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argument in the main text, her reconstruction remains largely deficient (see Allen, *The Politics of Our Selves*, pp. 56–8).
[90] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 102.
[91] Ibid., p. 105.
[92] Ibid., p. 108.
[93] Ibid, p. 109.

different governmental *dispositifs*.[94] Contrary to what some commentators assume[95], however, this gradual process should not be read in terms of "the replacement of the society of sovereignty by a society of discipline, and then of a society of discipline by a society, say, of government". Rather, sovereignty, discipline, and government draws a "triangle" of mutually supportive technologies of power, whereby what changes in the course of history is their mode of correlation, i.e. the pre-eminence of one of these strategies over the others.[96] To put it in a nutshell, as the outcome of the tendency of the state to equip itself with administrative functions, for Foucault modern power takes its most advanced and complex form when, in the 18th century, population becomes the object of totalizing and individualizing structures of government based on the biopolitical convergence between economic management and technologies of security, which at the same time differentiates itself from and combines with the exercise of sovereign and disciplinary power.

3. From Liberalism to Neoliberalism

Now, as Foucault explicitly claims at the beginning of *The Birth of Biopolitics*[97], the political culture of liberalism represents the condition of intelligibility of this new art of government. But "how can the phenomena of 'population' […] be taken into account in a system concerned about respect for legal subjects and individual free enterprise?".[98] Before exploring Foucault's response, it is necessary to shed some light on the changes occasioned by the project of a history of governmentality to his earlier analytics of power.

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[94] Ibid., p. 248.
[95] See, for instance, Osborne, "Techniken und Subjekte".
[96] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 108. Although he replaces the term "security" with that of "control", on the difference between these three forms of power see also Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control".
[97] Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 22
[98] Foucault, "The Birth of Biopolitics", p. 317.

The first pivot concerns the way in which the later Foucault conceptualizes power relations. Indeed, what his genealogy of governmentality reveals is a heterogeneous multiplicity of theories and practices all of which articulate – albeit in a different way – the same notion, which is to say the idea of the government of men. Accordingly, government progressively comes to figure not just as the mode of power exercise distinguishing *dispositifs* of security, but also as the paradigm of power relations.[99] In this sense, Gordon is right when he argues that for Foucault government has not only a narrow meaning but also a wide one[100], according to which government in general means "the conduct of conduct", i.e. a form of activity aiming at directing, shaping or affecting the conduct of some person, communities, social institutions, or even of our own self. Nonetheless, Gordon fails to clarify why after 1978 Foucault considers government as a more adequate notion around which to reformulate the central insights of his earlier analytics of power. My contention is that Foucault's reply lies in the structural relations he sees at play between the problematic of government and the three fundamental notions of the subject, freedom, and truth. Allow me explore each of these three concepts in turn.

(1) The Subject. As is well known, Foucault's late 1970s genealogy of modern governmentality is associated with a progressive "theoretical shift"[101] that enables him to refocus his archaeo-genealogical investigations around the essential theme he brackets in his early work, i.e. subjectivity. Contrary to what numerous commentators

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[99] That is the reason why, summarizing the thread of inquiry inaugurated in *Security, Territory, Population* and carried over in *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault states: "over the last two years I have […] tried to sketch out a bit this notion of government, which seemed to me to be much more operational than the notion of power, "government" being understood, of course, not in the narrow and current sense of the supreme instance of executive and administrative decisions in State systems, but in the broad sense, and old sense moreover, of mechanisms and procedures intended to conduct men, to direct their conduct, to conduct their conduct" (Foucault, *On the Government of the Living*, p. 12).

[100] Gordon, "Governmental Rationality: An Introduction", pp. 2–3.

[101] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 6.

have argued[102], however, this late "return" to the subject should not be read as a rejection of his earlier supposed anti-humanist stance, but rather as a gradual change of perspective which leads him to draw a "history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects".[103] Conditioned by its embeddedness in specific social and cultural contexts, for Foucault the subject is a historically variable "form"[104], of which he traces the genealogy "by studying its constitution across history that has led us up to the modern concept of the self".[105] Foucault coins his own term to designate such constituting process, i.e. "subjectivation".[106] The latter concept must be clearly distinguished from the notion of "subjection" employed so far, which – as we have seen – translates the French "*assujettissement*" (and less frequently "*sujétion*").[107] While subjection refers to the specifically modern interrelated phenomena of the disciplinary subjugation of "subjects of obedience" and the production of a subject bound to its own identity by the objectifying, truthful discourse of a particular knowledge apparatus, subjectivation points to the wider

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[102] See for example, Benhabib, *Situating the Self*; Bonnafous-Boucher, *Le libéralisme dans la pensée de Michel Foucault*; Dews, "The Return of the Subject in Late Foucault"; Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, especially lectures 9 and 10; Honneth, *The Critique of Power*; McCarthy, "The Critique of Impure Reason"; Visker, *Michel Foucault. Genealogy as Critique*.

[103] Foucault, "The Subject and Power", p. 326.

[104] Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom", p. 290.

[105] Foucault, "About the Beginning of the Hermeneutic of the Self", p. 201, text amended. This does not mean that Foucault is looking for the origin of the subject. Rather he investigates *how* we have been made to constitute ourselves as subject: "my problem was not to define the moment from which something like the subject appeared but rather the set of processes through which the subject exists with its different problems and obstacles and through forms that are far from being exhausted. It was a matter therefore of reintroducing the problem of the subject that I had more or less left aside in my first studies and of trying to follow the progress and the difficulties through its whole history" (Foucault, "The Return of Morality", p. 472).

[106] The word sounds the same in French and in English, albeit sometimes different translations are used, such as "subjectification" or "subjectivization". For a helpful examination of this term see Kelly, *The Political Philosophy of Michel Foucault*, pp. 88–9.

[107] Much of the current misunderstandings of Foucault's works is due to Judith Butler's misinterpretation, which conflates the two concepts in one single account that would run back as far as *Discipline and Punish* (see Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, p. 11). As I have already pointed out above, instead, in the latter text Foucault employs the term "*assujettissement*" only to indicate the investment of the individual by disciplinary power. For a similar error see Hoy, *Critical Resistance*, p. 70.

horizon of inquiry of a "history of subjectivity", namely a history of that kind of practices Foucault names "techniques of the self".[108] These designate

> the procedures […] suggested or prescribed to individuals in order to determine their identity, maintain it, or transform it […] through relations of self-mastery or self-knowledge.[109]

As the point of convergence between the history of subjectivity and the history of governmentality, therefore, Foucault's genealogy of the modern subject aims at exploring the interaction between techniques of domination and techniques of the self, that is to say the historically situated correlation between government of the other(s) and self-government. According to Foucault, the form this interaction takes in the modern era is that of an insidious colonization of technologies of the self by techniques of domination, which impose constraining modalities of self-governance in order to mould specific, governable identities. Consequently, although Foucault's 1970s theory of domination conceptualizes subjects exclusively with reference to the power-knowledge deployments that manufacture them, supporters and critics alike are mistaken when they argue that in Foucault's view power creates subjects directly.[110] On the contrary, in 1980 Foucault recognizes that

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[108] Foucault, "About the Beginning of the Hermeneutic of the Self", p. 203. Foucault adds these techniques to the tripartite classification Habermas proposes in his works of the 1960s and 1970s, according to which one must distinguish among techniques of production, techniques of signification, and techniques of domination. While the first ones indicate those practices that permit the manipulation of things, the second ones refer to the procedures aimed at the production of sense through the use of signs and meanings. The third kind of techniques, instead, is defined as "the techniques which permit one to determinate the conduct of individuals, to impose certain wills on them, and to submit them to certain ends or objectives" (Ibid.).

[109] Foucault, "Subjectivity and Truth", p. 87.

[110] See, for example, Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, p. 253; McNay, *Foucault*, pp. 100–04; and Barrett, *The Politics of* Truth, pp. 145–55.

when I was studying the asylums, prisons, and so on, I insisted, I think, too much on the techniques of domination. […] Power consists in complex relations: these relations involve a set of rational techniques, and the efficiency of those techniques is due to a subtle integration of coercion-technologies and self-technologies. I think we have to get rid of the more or less Freudian schema […] of the interiorization of the law by the self. Fortunately, from a theoretical point of view, and maybe unfortunately from a practical point of view, things are much more complicated than that. In short, having studied the field of government by taking as my point of departure techniques of domination, I would like in years to come to study government […] starting from the techniques of the self.[111]

As in Adorno's case, this means that for Foucault power works by triggering a specific modality of self-constitution, i.e. by conditioning the way one relates to oneself *qua* subject.[112] Indeed, while Adorno upholds that "individuals tend to reproduce within themselves, according to their initiative, all those administrative processes that are inflicted upon them from without" whereby "*each individual becomes [...] the official of its own administration*"[113], Foucault analogously claims that self-technologies should be considered as the essential relay for the influence of power: construed as the conduct of conduct, power "mobilizes the government of individuals in such a way that they take charge of their own self-governance"[114], thus creating themselves as subject according to the predominant regime of truth:

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[111] Foucault, "About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self", p. 204. To return to an earlier point, Foucault's attempt to distinguish his account from the psychoanalytic schema of internalization in this passage is a further evidence of the reduction operated by Cook when she claims that "to explain how individuals are subjected to power, Foucault employs (without acknowledging it) an ostensibly Freudian idea of internalization" (Cook, "Adorno, Foucault and Critique", p. 8).

[112] As Deleuze writes: "Foucault's fundamental idea is that of a dimension of subjectivity derived from power and knowledge without being dependent on them" (Deleuze, *Foucault*, p. 101).

[113] Horkheimer, Adorno, and Kogon, "Die Verwaltete Welt oder: die Krisis des Individuums", p. 124, my translation and emphasis added.

[114] Michaud, "De modes de subjectivation aux techniques de soi", p. 27, my translation. Accordingly, we can retrospectively read subjection as individuals being required to shape their own subjectivity according to pre-established norms, as it is confirmed by Foucault's reading of the practice of confession. In his view, modern Western societies have witnessed not only an overwhelming diffusion

This form of power that applies itself to immediate everyday life categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him that *he must recognize and others have to recognize in him*. It is a form of power that makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word "subject": subject to someone else by control and dependence, and *tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge*. Both meanings suggest a form of power that subjugates and makes subject to.[115]

(2) Freedom. "As a mode of action upon the actions of others"[116], the notion of government enables Foucault to discharge the idea of a reciprocal exclusion or contraposition between power and freedom, arguing instead that they are each the condition of possibility for the other: "as the government of men by other men […] power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are 'free'".[117] Indeed, resolving his earlier doubts with regards to the distinction of power from domination[118], in his later works Foucault becomes convinced of the necessity to carefully differentiate between three levels of an analytics of power[119]: (a) Power as "strategic games between liberties" defines the co-extensiveness of the social body with an ensemble of mobile and reversible relationships in which one tries to orchestrate the possible free space of action of others, whereby there can be no

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of confession outside ecclesiastical institutions (in particular in the human sciences), but also a progressive assumption of the latter as a distinctive modality of conduct, which requires of the individual that is to be governed the incessant, hermeneutic exposition of the secret of his own sex with the aim of producing docile and normalized subjectivities: "The obligation to confess is now relayed through so many different points, is so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us; on the contrary, it seems to us that truth, lodged in our most secret nature, 'demands' only to surface" (Foucault, *History of Sexuality 1*, pp. 59–60).

[115] Foucault, "The Subject and Power", p. 331, emphasis added.

[116] Ibid., p. 341. On the implicit reference of this definition to Weber's concept of *Lebensführung* see Chignola, "'*Phantasiebildern*' / '*histoire fiction*'"especially p. 62.

[117] Foucault, "The Subject and Power", pp. 341–42.

[118] In 1983, discussing the work of Arendt in which "the relation of domination has been constantly dissociated from the relation of power", Foucault still claims: "yet I wonder whether this distinction is not something of a verbal one; for we can recognize that certain power relations function is such a way as to constitute, globally, an effect of domination, but the network constituted by the power relations hardly allows for a decisive distinction" (Foucault, "Politics and Ethics: An Interview", p. 378).

[119] Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom", p. 299.

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power-free form of social interaction.[120] (2) These relationships are pitted against states of domination, in which a particular person or group is able to render power relations stable and irreversible. Thus, in Foucault's terminology states of domination describe a particular type of power relations marked by permanent asymmetry, oppression, and violence.[121] (3) To these two levels one should add a third one represented by governmental technologies. Occupying an intermediate position, the latter indicates more or less articulated and stabilized modes of power, which – by following a specific rationality in the attempt to achieve a particular goal – might engender states of domination.

(3) Truth. In the last years of his life, Foucault often repeats that together with the subject truth has always been the second pole of his philosophical enterprise.[122] Evidently, as the pole of the subject must be analysed in light of its historical constitution, for him the problem of truth is an historical one too: "I believe too much in truth not to suppose that there are different truths and different ways of speaking the truth".[123] Far from leaving itself open to the charges of relativism, this effect of pluralisation results in the project of drawing a "genealogy of regimes of veridiction", i.e. a history of the several configurations within which the relationship between truth and (self-)government has been thought. However, that involves an often-ignored reformulation of his earlier idea of regime of truth. From his 1980 lectures onwards, Foucault links the notion of regime of truth no longer to the circularity of knowledge

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[120] "Power relations are rooted deep in the social nexus, not a supplementary structure over and above "society" whose radical effacement one could perhaps dream of. To live in society is, in any event, to live in such a way that some can act on the actions of others. A society without power relations can only be an abstraction" (Foucault, "The Subject and Power", p. 343). Undoubtedly, the polemic target here is Habermas' theory of communicative action and the ideal presuppositions upon which it is grounded. I shall return on the Habermas/Foucault debate in Chapter 4.

[121] Ibid., pp. 347–48.

[122] "My own problem has always been the question of truth, of telling the truth, the *wahr-sagen* – what it is to tell the truth – and the relation between 'telling the truth' and forms of reflexivity, of self upon self" (Foucault, "Structuralism and Post-structuralism", p. 446 See also Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom", p. 281)

[123] Foucault, "An Aesthetics of Existence", p. 51.

and power I described above but rather to the dimension of subjectivity, which he introduces in the attempt to answer what he regards as the major political question of our present: "how does the truth oblige, in addition to the fact that it is manifested?".[124] Foucault's answer consists in showing that if truth is *index sui*, truth cannot be *lex sui*, since the rules governing the distinction between true and false statements are the outgrowth of a historical, cultural, and social process, or – to put it shortly – of a certain "government by the truth".[125] This means that, for Foucault, a game of truth[126] can only take place within the wider horizon of a regime of truth, which no longer indicates a system of constraints externally imposed onto the individual (subject only in the passive sense of the term), but the kind of methods and practices used in different institutional contexts to trigger specific processes of subjectivation in accordance with the hegemonic production of truth.[127] Resuming his discourse on modern governmentality in light of this shift, then, Foucault comes to backdate its emergence to the birth of *raison d'État* in the 16th century and to identify

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[124] Foucault, *On the Government of the Living*, p. 94. See also ibid., pp. 82–3.

[125] Ibid., p. 11. See also the following excerpt from an earlier interview: "If I wanted to pose and drape myself in a slightly fictive coherence, I would tell you that this has always been my problem: effects of power and the production of 'truth'. I have always felt ill at ease with this ideological notion which has been used so much in recent years. It has been used to explain errors or illusions, or shaded presentations – in short everything that impedes the formation of true discourses. It has also been used to show the relationship between what goes on in people's heads and their place in the relations of production. In sum, the economics of untruth. My problem is the *politics of truth*. I have taken a lot of time in realizing it" (Foucault, "The End of the Monarchy of Sex", p. 220, emphasis added).

[126] Stressing its tight connection with relations of power, Foucault define the latter as: "the *rules* according to which what a subject can say about certain things becomes assessable as true or false" (Foucault, "Foucault (under the pseudonym of Maurice Florence)", p. 460, translation amended and emphasis added). See also the following passage: "The word 'game' can lead you astray: when I say 'game', I mean a set of rules by which truth is produced. It is not a game in the sense of an amusement; it is a set of procedures that lead to a certain result, which, on the basis of its principles and rules of procedure, may be considered valid or invalid, winning or losing" (Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom", p. 297).

[127] On this point see also Senellart, "Course Context", p. 342. Albeit it remains somehow implicit, Foucault's distinction between games of truth and regimes of truth can be grasped when (in a Wittgesteinian way) he describes science as "a family of games of truth all of which submit to the same regime, although they are not subject to the same grammar, and this very specific, very particular regime of truth is a regime in which the power of the truth is organized in a way such that constraint is assured by truth itself". Nonetheless, science "is only one of the possible regimes of truth [...]. There are many other ways of binding the individual to the manifestation of truth" (Foucault, *On the Government of the Living,* p. 99).

it with the development of a new regime of truth. Demarcating itself from the ancient idea of a cosmic order into which the action of government must be rightly inserted, modern governmentality corresponds to a different ensemble of veridicative conditions, according to which individuals are called to mould their identity as governable subjects with reference to the rational and scientific knowledge grounding government's own command.[128] However, if within state police it is still the sovereign who owns this knowledge, for Foucault the irruption of the liberal art of government in the 18th century marks a modification of the modern regime of truth, which stands diametrically opposed to the rule of *raison d'État*.[129] In order to explain what this transformation amounts to, I shall proceed by reviewing Foucault's later portrait of liberalism, focusing especially on the circular interdependence of freedom and control on which its political rationality is based.

As we have seen in the previous section, *raison d'État* still describes a *dispositif* of government whose aim is to increase the state's wealth and strength through the coordinated, dispositional administration of people and commerce. Moving from the premise of a definitive break of the continuity between state and government, instead, liberalism recognizes the opaque quasi-naturalness of society's bio-economic processes and uses them to limit the government of the state, thus providing a rationalization of the imperatives marking its biopolitical power. In particular, the key innovation of liberalism consists in the introduction of the market as a form of limitation of the rule of public authorities alongside the juridical critique of sovereign power wielded by the progressive democratisation of the subject of right. As a

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[128] See Foucault, "'*Omnes et Singulatim*'", p. 315.

[129] Foucault's analysis is rather ambiguous on this point. On the one hand, he upholds that liberalism corresponds to the last and most developed stage of *raison d'État* (see Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 28), which nonetheless involves profound transformations. On the other, however, he repeatedly points to a contraposition between the two political rationalities and claims that these transformations amount to a disruption of the very same foundations of *raison d'État* (Ibid., p. 22). As I go on to argue in the main text, I will privilege this second interpretation.

principle of internal limitation, the market comes to be regarded as "a site of verification-falsification" for the action of government, which allows to discern between beneficial and harmful, necessary and superfluous governmental practices[130]: being oriented to ensure the general accumulation of wealth, the politico-economic knowledge of the quasi-natural laws of the spontaneous equilibrium of market prices defines the conditions of possibility as well as the limits of exercise of the liberal *dispositifs* of government operating in the social milieu, whose utility must conform to the fundamental economic variables at the basis of the complex interplay between individual and collective interests.[131] To put it differently, by indexing the rationality of its juridical apparatuses to the economic dynamics of exchange, liberalism derives the general prosperity from the respect and promotion of the "invisible", non-totalizable plurality of society's particular interests, which render literally impossible the point of view of sovereignty.[132] Accordingly, as "the art of the least possible government"[133], the liberal regime takes the shape of a fragile system of coordination geared to the production of the optimal conditions for the subjects' enterprise, whose centripetal and unequal interests are recomposed into the unity of the juridical-political dimension of sovereignty only thanks to the "natural" regulation ensured by

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[130] Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 32. On this point see also Burchell, "Particular Interests".

[131] Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, p., pp. 42–7. See also Ibid., p. 283 where Foucault defines political economy as a critique (in Kant's sense of the term) of governmental reason.

[132] See Ibid., pp. 278–86. In particular, discussing Smith's theory of the invisible hand, Foucault comments: "For there to be certainty of collective benefit, […] it is absolutely necessary that each actor be blind with regard to this totality. […] The collective good must not be an objective. It must not be an objective because it cannot be calculated, at least, not within an economic strategy. […] In other words, what is usually stressed in Smith's famous theory of the invisible hand is, if you like, the "hand," that is to say, the existence of something like providence which would tie together all the dispersed threads. But I think the other element, invisibility, is at least as important. […] Invisibility is absolutely indispensable. It is an invisibility which means that no economic agent should or can pursue the collective good. But we must no doubt go further than economic agents; not only no economic agent, but also no political agent. In other words, the world of the economy must be and can only be obscure to the sovereign. […] In the middle of the eighteenth century, political economy denounces the paralogism of political totalization of the economic process" (Ibid., pp. 279–81). On the impossibility of a sovereign grip of the economy see also Chignola, "L'impossibile del sovrano", especially pp. 57–65 and Lemke, Krasmann, Bröckling, "Gouvernamentalität, Neoliberalismus, Selbsttechnologien", especially pp. 14 and ff.

[133] Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 28.

the governmental technology of civil society.[134] This means that liberalism assumes as its principle that of "not interfering, allowing free movement, letting things follow their course: *laisser faire, passer et aller*"[135], while refuting any pretension to foster the over-all convergence of the heterogeneous interests through distorting interventions. The liberal regime functions only "insofar as a number of freedoms actually exist: freedom of the market, […] the free exercise of property rights, freedom of discussion, possible freedom of expression, and so on".[136] Here, however, it is not a simple matter of respecting these freedoms. Rather, for Foucault, liberalism entails a problematic relationship of production *and* destruction with freedom:

> The new governmental reason needs freedom […], the new art of government consumes freedom. It consumes freedom, which means that it must produce it. It must produce it, it must organize it.[137]

In other terms, liberalism actively encourages certain liberties, but at the same time it puts in place a series of juridical measures to frame them (e.g. anti-monopoly provisions). The result is that under liberalism freedom requires to be organized and channelled thorough the prudent intervention of a whole set of apparatuses of security.[138] This interplay between freedom and security represents the constitutive mechanism of the new art of government[139]: on the one hand, the responsible, free

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[134] See Ibid., pp. 291–96.

[135] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 48.

[136] Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 63.

[137] Ibid.

[138] In this sense, I strongly disagree with Bonnafous-Boucher's argument, according to which the concept of freedom itself would not play any crucial role in Foucault's account of liberalism (see Bonnafous-Boucher, *Le libéralisme dans la pensée de Michel Foucault*, in particular section 2). For a helpful exposition of these themes see also Lemke, *Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique*, pp. 41–55.

[139] See Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 353. See also Dean, *Governmentality*, pp. 138–39.

venture of the governed "is […] the correlative of the […] apparatuses of security"[140] that guarantee the effective functioning of the processes of economy and population alike. On the other, the governmental strategies of security "ensure that the mechanism of interests does not give rise to individual or collective dangers"[141] for the appropriate exercise of individuals' freedom on the marketplace. Nevertheless, liberalism considers dangers and insecurities (like the threat of unemployment, poverty, and monopolies) more as prerequisites than negative externalities for the functioning of liberal freedoms. Indeed, starting from the 19th century, the development of liberal governmentality is associated with an authentic "political culture of danger" regulated by a whole set of biopolitical deployments of security, whereby individuals "are conditioned to experience their situation, their life, their present, and their future as containing danger".[142] Accordingly, it seems legitimate to claim that the *homo œconomicus* of liberal theories is not a free subject, but rather a subject that is "*produced as free*".[143] The liberal subject is not "an atom of freedom in the face of all the conditions, undertakings, legislation, and prohibitions of a possible government". On the contrary, it is a "type of subject who precisely enables an art of government to be determined according to the principle of economy, both in the sense of political economy and in the sense of the […] frugality of government"[144]. The *homo œconomicus*, therefore, is shaped as an autonomous subject by the liberal *dispositifs* of security regulating its free enterprise in a market system plagued with risks, with which the subject itself is called to cope according to the prudential and responsible estimation of its own interests. To put it in a nutshell, as a critical reflection on the art of government, for Foucault liberalism is less a doctrine of the

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[140] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 48.
[141] Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 65.
[142] Ibid., p. 66.
[143] Chignola, "L'impossibile del sovrano", p. 63, my translation, emphasis added.
[144] Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 271, translation amended.

retreat of the state than an "ethos of review" which aims to construct a free society through the biopolitical fabrication of a specific kind free subject, whose liberties are rooted in the same economic dimension founding liberalism's own governmentality. Now, as I shall show below, Foucault's picture of liberalism resonates with Adorno's suspicions about the ambiguous role of the value of freedom in modernity. However, this prima facie confluence also shades an essential difference, which has to do both with the nature of our (un)freedom and with the configuration assumed by power in late modern societies. As the reader might recall, for Adorno, the liberal phase of capitalist production required a minimal degree of freedom for its own development, whereby individuals were called to shape themselves as independent, prudent, and adventurous entrepreneurs in accordance with the general principle of competition. Yet, Adorno also holds that the denaturalizing mechanisms of the current social organisation have stripped individuals of even this incipient and partial freedom, which means that today autonomous self-determination has become a mere illusion. For this reason, in *Negative Dialectics* he writes:

> The individual feels free in so far as he has opposed himself to society and can do something – though incomparably less than he believes – against society and other individuals. His freedom is primarily that of a man pursuing his own ends, ends that are not directly and totally exhausted by social ends. In this sense, freedom coincides with the principle of individuation. A freedom of this type has broken loose from primitive society; within an increasingly rational one, it has achieved a measure of reality. At the same time, in the midst of bourgeois society, freedom remains no less delusive than individuality itself. A critique of free will as well as of determinism means a critique of this delusion. The law of value comes into play over the heads of formally free individuals. They are unfree, according to Marx's insight, as the involuntary executors of that law – the more thoroughly unfree the more rank the growth of the social

antagonisms it took to form the very conception of freedom. The process of evolving

individual independence is a function of the exchange society and terminates in the

individual's abolition by integration.[145]

Activities that seem to derive from the free pursuit of our rational choices are in effect

the result of the internalization of social norms as super-ego introjections, whereby

our interests come to coincide with the market-mediated imperatives of the social

totality: "freedom", Adorno argues, "is really delimited by society, not only from

outside but in itself".[146] In this respect, according to Adorno, there is a neat line of

continuity between Western capitalist democracies and the nominally socialist

regimes of the (former) Eastern Bloc. Indeed, although he recognizes that in liberal

societies individuals can at least enjoy formal freedoms, in both cases the increasing

concentration of the economy and the unbridled sway exercised by the executives and

the bureaucracy have narrowed down freedom to a pre-given set of options, none of

which can really challenge the power of the social totality.[147] We thus lack real

alternatives: as historical products[148], the contours of our freedom are pre-determined

and controlled by the existing deployments of power in such a way that we are

induced to uncritically make choices confined within the limits of what is already

expected, whereby political dissent is re-absorbed into off-the-peg subcultures and

marketable lifestyles.[149] That is the reason why, in a proto-Foucauldian vein, Adorno

claims that "under existing circumstances there is a touch of freedom in refusing to

accept the alternatives. Freedom means to criticize and change situations, not to

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[145] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 261–62, translation amended.
[146] Ibid., p. 297. As Adorno continues, "we no sooner put it to use than we increase our unfreedom; […]. Even where men are most likely to feel free from society, in the strength of their ego, they are society's agents at the same time. The ego principle is implanted in them by society, and society rewards that principle although it curbs it".
[147] Adorno, *History and Freedom*, p. 5.
[148] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 218.
[149] See Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 155.

confirm them by deciding within their coercive structure".[150] Such a critical stance, however, is extremely difficult to attain, because the identities we subject ourselves to become so ossified and ingrained that we can hardly see through them. Again, here, Adorno's and Foucault's positions appear to largely mirror one another: the distinctive operation of modern power consists in crafting our self-constituting processes so as to tie them to a specific form of subjectivity, whether that might be the governable figure of the *homo œconomicus* the later Foucault identifies as the main referent of the liberal art of government, or the manipulable and gregarious character-mask of late capitalism Adorno speaks about. In conformity with his belief in the predominance of exchange relations, Adorno further develops his account of the new human type by connecting its individualization to the acquisition of a socio-economic role within the capitalist totality. Accordingly, he can state that "the liberated ego, no longer locked up in its identity, would no longer be condemned to play roles either. […] society would lose the horror of shaping the individuals throughout".[151] We might still believe that our freedom is not limited to what is expected by our role in the social structure, but insofar as we do so for Adorno, we are caught up in the delusive bound of ideology, because the category of autonomy "has been created in the unfree individual's image".[152] Still, if ideology conceals the reach of capitalist reification on our life, this does not imply that the current state of unfreedom leaves no sign on the individual. To the contrary, Adorno provides us with a phenomenological perspective on the various forms of suffering occasioned by biopolitical reification. In this respect, notwithstanding the risks of normalization and commodification intrinsic in a critique of social suffering – to which I shall return briefly in Chapter 4 –, my contention is that Adorno's analyses can be seen as

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[150] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics,* p. 226 note.
[151] Ibid., pp. 278–79.
[152] Ibid., p. 275. See also Ibid., p. 262.

complementing Foucault's explanation of the politics of visibility put in place by the biopolitical apparatuses of modern power, which overlooks the crucial importance of the subject's own experience of suffering for the intelligibility of the procedures of domination distorting contemporary life world. To be more precise, Adorno aims to reveal the generalised and ordinary experiences associated with the growing dependency of individuals from the structures of the "hellish, compulsive […] whole from which we all suffer".[153] On his view, individuals confront society as a non-transparent and impenetrable otherness, whose "cold, dehumanized, and alienated […] relationships"[154] are at the source of the fundamental evils characterizing our tormented and damaged condition. As his "physiognomy" of late capitalism reveals, in fact, the inversion of the means-ends relationship proper to the "organisational overshadowing of ever more spheres of life" relies on a series of mechanisms of marginalisation, exploitation, and depersonalisation, whereby "society is immediately perceptible where it hurts".[155] In this respect, certain passages of his work seem to suggest a rather materialist position, according to which Adorno connects the negativity of these mechanisms to the fact that they are conducive to intrinsically obnoxious forms of physical suffering.[156] Still, following Freyenhagen, I think Adorno holds the more plausible view that "all negativity […] is *modelled on physical suffering*"[157], whose symptoms are regularly an index of the diffused sense of vulnerability, anguish, and hopelessness marking our life. Hence, contrary to what Honneth contends, I regard the concept of suffering in Adorno not only as referring to

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[153] Adorno, *Introduction to Sociology*, p. 84.
[154] Adorno, *The Stars Down to Earth*, p. 131.
[155] Adorno, *Introduction to Sociology*, p. 36.
[156] "All pain and negativity […] are the many times over mediated, sometimes become unrecognizable form of the physical, just as all happiness aims at sensual fulfilment and garners its objectivity in it" (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 202, Redmond's translation used)
[157] Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy*, p. 187.

a "restriction of [human beings'] rational capacities"[158], but also as denoting the affective experience derived from our fragmented, senseless, and often unspeakable encounter with the objective bads of the current state of affairs, like the uncertainty and despair occasioned by the precarisation of the workforce, the degradation accompanying poverty, the disrespect and mis-recognition implicit in various acts of discrimination, or the threat of exclusion striking whoever does not comply with the prescribed standard of sexuality.[159] Even what are commonly regarded as experiences of health and vitality, for Adorno, are in reality manifestations of the decay of the living caused by self-affirmative logic of biopolitical reification under the guise of an abstract "cult of life for its own sake"[160] that covers up the negative effects of capitalist domination, whereby he can claim that the sickness of a healthy normality prepares "corpses, from whom the news of their not-quite-successful decease has been withheld for reasons of population policy".[161] But it is in Adorno's discussion of unfreedom that the experience of suffering linked to the malaise of our social world comes more evidently to the fore. We have seen above that today, for Adorno, individuals live under the illusion of being free, substantial selves, while in reality autonomy is just an ideological compensation for their lack of self-determination vis-à-vis the economic structures of advanced capitalist societies, which have surreptitiously taken control of every recess of their life. As long as this delusion persists, Adorno claims, "the consciousness is taught the moment of its unfreedom solely in pathological conditions, as in compulsory neuroses".[162] Indeed, the "truth-content of neuroses is that they demonstrate the unfreedom of the ego in itself in what

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[158] Honneth, "A Physiognomy of the Capitalist Form of Life", p. 60.
[159] As far as the latter is concerned, Adorno goes so far as to assert that today "social suffering" is "displaced onto sexuality", whereby "sexuality becomes the nerve centre of society" (Adorno, "Sexual Taboos and Law Today", p. 77).
[160] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 77.
[161] Ibid., p. 59.
[162] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 222, Redmond's translation used and amended.

is ego-alien, the feeling of 'But that's not me at all'; there, where its domination over inner nature fails".[163] According to Adorno, therefore, freedom nowadays can be conceived only "as the polemical counter-image to the suffering under social compulsion, unfreedom as its mirror-image".[164] One consequence of this is that the abolition of suffering, at least in its "superfluous"[165] manifestation, is interlaced with the overcoming of the historical conditions that lie at the root of our unfreedom, i.e. – as we shall see in more detail below – upon the collective realization of a free society:

> Freedom, which would arise only in the organization of a free society, is sought precisely where it is denied by the organization of the existing society: in each individual.[166]

On Adorno's account, however, meeting the moral demand entailed in such a political quest for freedom seems to be hardly possible when confronted with the all-pervasive power of the exchange society, not least because "whatever an individual or a group may undertake against the totality they are part of is infected by the evil of that totality; and no less infected is he who does nothing at all".[167] Indeed, the restriction of freedom has as its major implication that today the practice of morality itself becomes highly uncertain.[168] To state it with Adorno's famous words, "there is no right life in the wrong [life]".[169] Morality is not practicable because any action

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[163] Ibid., Redmond's translation used and amended.

[164] Ibid., p. 223, Redmond's translation used.

[165] The expression "superfluous suffering" is suggested by Geuss in *Outside Ethics*, p. 112.

[166] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 276.

[167] Ibid., p. 243, translation amended.

[168] See Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 299. Elsewhere Adorno states: "the possibility of freedom has sunk to such a minimal level that we can or must ask ourselves very seriously whether any scope is left for our moral categories" (Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, pp. 98–9).

[169] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 39. Freyenhagen's translation. This translation seems to be the only one able to capture the ambiguities of the terms "*richtig*" and "*falsch*", by which Adorno means not only that life can no longer be emphatically lived, "but also that living a morally right life is blocked" (see Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy*, p. 66).

individuals undertake falls short of meeting the moral demand of changing the social structures responsible for blocking our own freedom:

> The more mercilessly an objective-antagonistic society will comport itself in every situation, the less can any single moral decision be warranted as the right one. […]. The individual who imagines itself to be morally safe, fails and participates in guilt, because, being harnessed to the social order, it has hardly any power over the conditions which appeal to the ethical [*sittliche*] *ingenium*: crying out for its transformation.[170]

In other terms, we are so thoroughly integrated in our social world, that we are destined to contribute to its perpetuation, either by sustaining the *status quo* or by entrenching its badness through our morally wrong deeds. Being compassionate towards African migrants by helping them reach the coasts of Southern Europe, for instance, might alleviate their suffering in the short-run, but it falls short of addressing the political and economic causes of the phenomenon of migration. Even worse, it can reinforce structural injustices, by providing the capitalist system with an easily exploitable workforce that is willing to work for relatively low wages. On the other hand, however, failing to show compassion towards the migrants renders us morally responsible for not aiding people in a situation of objective suffering. One might wonder whether this generalised condition of moral precarity would hold true – at least (to continue with the example) in simpler cases of compassion towards an indigent person we might meet on the street –, if it were deprived of the theoretical support it finds in Adorno's holistic view of social reality, which he assumes as a premise without bothering to demonstrate its plausibility. But notwithstanding the risk of moral flattening Adorno's position entails, what concerns me here is showing

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[170] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 243, translation amended. For a more detailed account see again Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy*, especially pp. 90–5.

that for him the complexity and constitutive impenetrability of our social world largely hinders the acquisition of the informational and practical resources necessary to build a morally right life beyond capitalist reification. To put it shortly, on his account, not only the ideological order of society blurs the dynamics we are caught in and our real interests, but persistent suffering undermines the conditions for the emergence of an effective political agency of change, thereby leaving open the possibility that catastrophic events like Auschwitz will happen again.

Incisive as they might appear, however, Adorno's analyses of the modern individual's embodied experience of suffering and unfreedom come at a price. By framing domination only in terms of ideological manipulation and disciplinary integration, in fact, Adorno's appears to overlook the crucial modification in the technologies of power prompted by the development of the liberal regimes of government. It is precisely this shift, instead, that captures the later Foucault's attention. The investigation of the instances motivating the biopolitical government of population proper to liberalism allows him to note that alongside a "considerable expansion of [disciplinary] procedures of control, constraint, and coercion" there appears "mechanisms with the function of producing, breathing life into, and increasing freedom, of introducing additional freedom through additional control and intervention", whereby "control is no longer just the necessary counterweight to freedom, as in the case of panopticism: it becomes its mainspring".[171] As an example of these dynamics Foucault refers to the welfare policies started by Roosevelt in 1932, which represent a series of artificial interventions geared to produce "more freedom in a dangerous situation of unemployment: freedom to work, freedom of consumption, political freedom, and so on".[172] Far from being confined to the liberal

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[171] Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 67.
[172] Ibid., p. 68.

regime, therefore, the new political rationality extends itself to all Western governmental practices between the 19th and 20th century, marking the advent of innovative techniques of control with respect to which the disciplinary model of power becomes increasingly inappropriate.[173] To state it otherwise, the climax of disciplinary power is at the same time the starting point of a progressive recession of its centrality, which Adorno entirely neglects by focusing only on disciplinary integration. His death in 1969, furthermore, prevents him from witnessing how this recession turns into an authentic crisis during the late 1970s, namely at the time of the passage from the welfarist and fordist regime of accumulation to the postfordist and neoliberal mode of regulation. On the other hand, the later Foucault appears to be fully aware of this crucial historical transformation. In a 1978 interview entitled "La société disciplinaire en crise", he claims that it seems to be "evident that we will have to say good-bye to the disciplinary society as we know it today". Indeed, "during the last few years, society has changed and individuals too: they are ever more diverse, different, and independent".[174] That is the reason why elsewhere he argues that

> starting in the 1960s, it began to be realised that such a cumbersome form of power [i.e. disciplinary power] was no longer as indispensable as had been thought and that industrial societies could content themselves with a much looser form of power over the body. Then it was discovered that control of sexuality could be attenuated and given new forms. One needs to study what kind of body the current society needs…[175]

This means that recognizing the crisis of discipline is not tantamount to say that power no longer targets the individual and its body. Rather, the point becomes that of

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[173] See Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 48.
[174] Foucault, "La société disciplinaire en crise", p. 533.
[175] Foucault, "Body/Power", p. 58.

exploring the new forms assumed by individuation, which works not so much in the form of a capillary and serried power fabricating and managing individuals through the imposition of external and constraining norms, but rather as a flexible and securitarian intervention onto the social environment. In order to clarify what Foucault has in mind here, I shall proceed by reviewing his picture of the neoliberal art of government as he portrays it in *The Birth of Biopolitics*.

On Foucault's view, both the German variant of ordoliberalism and the American neoliberalism of the Chicago School develop as a response to the artificial mechanisms of economic intervention put in place by the welfare state, which they denounce as "liberogenic".[176] More specifically, ordoliberalism moves from an anti-naturalistic conception of the market, according to which the market no longer represents a natural economic reality describing the principle of limitation of state interference, but rather requires incessant political and legal interventions in order to reproduce the conditions for the smooth functioning of economic competition.[177] Serving as a legitimizing element for the reconstruction of the post-war German state, in fact, for the ordoliberals competition replaces the old, liberal idea of exchange as the driving force of society, whereby the government's objective is not a uniform society subject to the equivalence of commodity-exchange but an "enterprise society".[178] In this sense, as Foucault remarks, the ordoliberals share with the

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[176] Foucault defines "liberogenic" all those devises "intended to produce freedom which potentially risk producing exactly the opposite" (Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 69). As far as German ordoliberalism is concerned, Foucault's main references go to the works of Walter Eucken, Ludwig Erhard, Alexander Rüstow, Wilhelm Röpke. Among the exponents of the Chicago School, instead, Foucault includes Friedrich von Hayek (who, as Austrian emigrant in the US, represents the *trait d'union* between the two traditions), Henry Calvert Simons, Gary Becker, Jacob Mincer, and many others.

[177] See Ibid., pp. 116–21. For the ordoliberals, Foucault argues, "there will not be the market game, which must be left free, and then the domain in which the state begins to intervene, since the market, or rather pure competition, which is the essence of the market, can only appear if it is produced, and if it is produced by an active governmentality. There will thus be a sort of complete superimposition of market mechanisms, indexed to competition, and governmental policy. [...] One must govern for the market, rather than because of the market" (Ibid., p. 121).

[178] Ibid., p. 147.

Frankfurt School a strong critique of the massifying effects intrinsic in the bureaucratization and technicization of late modern society. Yet, at the root of the irrationality of capitalism the ordoliberals place the destructive intrusions of the state in the realm of the economy and not the contradictions intrinsic in its logic, whereby their solution consists not in a new social rationality beyond capitalism (as it is still the case for Adorno and Horkheimer) but rather in an innovative social policy [*Gesellschaftspolitik*] based on the generalization of the entrepreneurial model to the entire social body. Through a massive redefinition of the juridical institutions of the state, therefore, the ordoliberals find in the equal inequality of all the principle regulating not only economic growth but also the construction of a new social environment [*soziale Umwelt*][179], in which "a sort of social ethic of the enterprise"[180] comes to be associated with a *Vitalpolitik*, a moral and political framework of cooperative human values compensating the cold monster of capitalism.[181] According to Foucault's reconstruction, instead, it is by repudiating the German "social market economy" that the American variant of neoliberalism distinguishes its position.[182] Their points of departure are the same: the critique of welfare policies and the idea of enterprise as the key element for deciphering economic dynamics. Nevertheless, American anarcho-capitalism represents a radicalization of this position, whereby German ordoliberalism still assigns too much significance to state intervention. Whereas the ordoliberals aim at governing society in the name of the economy, for

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[179] Ibid., p. 143.
[180] Ibid., p. 147.
[181] See Ibid., pp. 239–42. In a text reported by the editor of the lectures, Rüstow defines the *Vitalpolitik* in the following terms: " […] a policy of life, which is not essentially oriented to increased earnings and reduced hours of work, like traditional social policy, but which takes cognizance of the worker's whole vital situation, his real, concrete situation from morning to night and from night to morning, material and moral hygiene, the sense of property, the sense of social integration, etcetera, being in his view as important as earnings and hours of work" (ibid., p. 157, note 62). For an insightful explanation of the ordoliberal *Vitalpolitik* see Rose, "Tod des Sozialen? Eine Neubestimmung der Grenzen des Regierens", in which Rose contends that the neoliberal policies amount not to the "death of the social" but rather to its redefinition in the sense of a political community.
[182] See Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 145.

the Chicago School economy provides the analytical and political "grid of intelligibility"[183] of every form of human behaviour to the extent that the latter can be described in terms of the allocation of scant resources for competing goals.[184] The result is that neoliberalism conceives of the individual as a *homo œconomicus*, where the latter, though, describes no longer the liberal subject of exchange, but rather an entrepreneurial self possessing a certain human capital made up of inborn genetic qualities, subjective capacities, psycho-physical attitudes and skills acquired in response to corresponding stimuli (nutrition, education, training, love, etc.), which can be invested in the attempt to maximize one's revenue.[185] As Foucault argues, this neoliberal expansion of the economic approach has major implications for the relationship between the state and society: if in classical liberalism the state was demanded to respect the natural domain of the market, the neoliberal analyses "turn *laissez-faire* into a *do-not-laisser-faire* government, in the name of a law of the market which will enable each of its activities to be measured and assessed". With neoliberalism the economic matrix provides the technical instruments for the critical appraisal of governmental practices, whereby the market itself becomes "a sort of

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[183] Ibid., p. 243.

[184] However, Foucault warns us that it *not* a matter of a new anthropology: "considering the subject as *homo œconomicus* does not imply an anthropological identification of any behaviour whatsoever with economic behaviour. It simply means that economic behaviour is the grid of intelligibility one will adopt on the behaviour of a new individual" (Ibid., p. 252). This qualification represents a further evidence of the fact that Foucault thinks it is no longer a matter of disciplinary practices, with which as we have seen above human sciences (anthropology, psychology, etc.) are closely interrelated.

[185] For instance, while classical political economy as well as Marx would still construe labour from the abstract perspective of quantities of forces and working hours geared to the production of goods through rational investments of capital, the neoliberal theory of human capital maintains that the distinction between labour and capital must be discharged in favour of a re-conceptualisation of wage labourers as autonomous entrepreneurs of themselves, who are fully accountable for the efficient investment of their competences (see Ibid., pp. 219–27). Likewise, the American neo-liberals break with the 19th century figure of "*homo criminalis*". As Foucault shows with particular reference to Becker's position, the criminal is seen not as a psychologically corrupted person but rather as an economic-rational agent who risks punishment for an expected profit. Consequently, according to this view, the penal system must work as a "negative demand" of sanctions against the supply of crimes, which is to say as the enforcement of a whole series of punitive measures for disincentivizing "criminal externalities" (see Ibid., pp. 250–60).

permanent economic tribunal confronting government".[186] While it shares with classical liberalism the idea that the rationality of government coincides with the economic rationality of the subjects of interest freely acting on the market, this means that neoliberalism finds the principle of its rationality no longer in a supposedly pre-given natural freedom, but rather in a governmentally crafted entrepreneurial form of responsible behaviour. Through the transformation of the costs of social risks into a matter of self-care and personal provisions, neoliberalism forces individuals to shape their life according to the model of the enterprise, thus constructing a perfect correspondence between the economic-rational individual and the morally responsible one. Accordingly, the action of neoliberal government aspires to optimize the conditions for the enterprise of manageable, responsible, and autonomous subjects, who are marked both by the capacity to invest their human capital in the most profitable way and by their fitness to the ever-changing modifications artificially introduced into the socio-economic environment by *dispositifs* of security. In this respect, Foucault can claim that

> what appears on the horizon […] is not at all the ideal or project of an exhaustively
> disciplinary society in which the legal network hemming in individuals is taken over and
> extended internally by […] normative mechanisms. Nor is it a society in which a
> mechanism of general normalization and the exclusion of those who cannot be
> normalized is needed. On the horizon […] we see instead the image, idea, or theme-
> program of a society in which there is an optimization of systems of difference, in which
> the field is left open to fluctuating processes, in which minority individuals and practices
> are tolerated, in which action is brought to bear on the rules of the game rather than on
> the players, and finally in which there is an environmental type of intervention instead of

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[186] Ibid., p. 247, translation amended.

the internal subjugation of individuals.[187]

To put it differently, the neoliberal universalization of the economic form configures itself as a governmental intervention which organize the social milieu in such a way as to call individuals to engage in specific techniques of the self by conducting themselves as governable subjects, while at the same time leaving the space open to the exploitative accommodation of the multiple differences deriving from the pursuit of one's free venture. As a result, for Foucault, "those who denounce a 'Sombartian society' […] a standardizing market society of consumption and spectacle, […] are mistaken when they think they are criticizing the current objective of governmental policy".[188] Rather, their critique is the "inflationary" expression of a dubious "phobia of the state", according to which they share with the exponents of neoliberalism the idea that any state interventionism is tantamount to a relapse into totalitarianism.[189] Admittedly, Foucault grants that with their critique of market society theorists like Sombart, Adorno, Marcuse, and Debord criticize "something that was certainly on the explicit or implicit horizon, willed or not, of the arts of government [from the twenties to the sixties]". But, as Foucault maintains, "we have gone beyond that stage". We "are no longer there", since the neoliberal art of government, "which has

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[187] Ibid., pp. 259–60.

[188] Ibid., p. 149.

[189] Ibid., p. 187. As Foucault explicitly argues, this kind of critique should be discarded for the following reasons: (1) it falls prey to the commonplace idea that there is an endogenous tendency of the state to absorb civil society; (2) it draws a strong line of continuity, or even an evolutionary affiliation, between the different forms assumed by modern state interventionism (the administrative state, the bureaucratic state, the welfare state, the totalitarian state, etc.), whose generic "disqualification by the worst" ends up loosing sight of their historical specificity; (3) it allows "one to avoid paying the price of reality and actuality inasmuch as, in the name of this dynamism of the state, something like a kinship or danger, something like the great fantasy of the paranoiac and devouring state can always be found. To that extent, ultimately it hardly matters what one's grasp of reality is or what profile of actuality reality presents"; (4) it does not carry out a criticism of itself, whereby it renounces to investigate what is the ultimate source of this anti-state suspicion. To the contrary, for Foucault, "the welfare state has neither the same form, of course, nor, […] the same root or origin as the totalitarian state, as the Nazi, fascist, or Stalinist state". The latter are rather the result of a hypertrophic practice of government centred upon the party, which is paralleled in 20th century societies by a progressive reduction of the state in favour of new forms of liberal governmentality. The distance from Adorno with respect to these points could not be greater (Ibid., pp. 187–92).

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now become the program of most governments in capitalist countries, absolutely does not seek the constitution of that type of society. It involves, on the contrary, obtaining a society that is not oriented towards the commodity and the uniformity of the commodity, but towards the multiplicity and differentiation of enterprises".[190] Yet, one might be willing to call his argument into question insofar as Foucault only talked about "what was going on in the heads of economists", failing to "assess the extent to which neo-liberal policies actually succeeded in steering the West away from a market society and towards an enterprise society".[191] Most notably, Cook claims that the persistence of monopoly conditions in contemporary capitalism mitigates "competition to the point where they arguably compromise the enterprise society that neo-liberalism seeks", thereby undermining the cogency of Foucault's account.[192] I shall counter to these objections by emphasising the following two points: firstly, there is no trace in Cook's work of the recent literature that has tried to clarify and even radicalize Foucault's genealogical explorations of neoliberalism. In particular, I have in mind Dardot and Laval's *The New Way of the World*, whose excellent reconstruction has showed the *empirical validity* of the bulk of Foucault's propositions about neoliberalism. As Dardot and Laval illustrate, during the last thirty years the rise of "really existing" neoliberalism has been facilitated by a kind of hijacking of the state towards the edification of an enterprise society. The restructuring of the administrative power of the state via public management and the organisational developments of work environment have concurred to the emergence of governmental forms of individuation based upon a competition-driven apparatus of performance and pleasure, whose reflexivity seeks to ensure the unlimited expansion

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[190] Ibid., p. 149.
[191] See Cook, "Foucault and Adorno on Power and Exchange", pp. 195–97. As Cook herself notes, an exception might be France under the government of Giscard d'Estaing (see Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, lecture of March 7th 1979).
[192] Ibid., pp. 195–96.

of capitalism not by an external and aggressive negation of social life, but rather by the affirmative appropriation of its self-productive movement.[193] Secondly, Cook's argument about monopoly capitalism does not stick. Monopolies are part and parcel of free economic competition and as far as they do not raise barriers to enter the market – as it is still the case with the state monopolies Adorno discusses –, they do not constitute a threat for this principle. As Davies puts it, the neoliberal "argument would be: if you don't like the fact that Apple dominates the mobile phone and digital music market then don't go and complain to the government but go and set up another Apple yourself. Who is stopping you? You are in a free society, you've got your own human capital, you've got the capacity to strike up relationships with technologists, with creditors and so on" – in sum you have everything you need to succeed.[194] It is precisely the novelty of this rationality that Foucault wishes to convey by stressing the shift from the centrality of exchange to the centrifugal force of competition, whose logic entails not the exclusion of commodifying effects (as Cook appears to suggest[195]) but rather their redefinition as results of the imperative of competition itself. On the basis the above examination, therefore, it seems misguided to argue as Fraser does that "a new regime oriented to 'deregulation' and 'flexibilization' was about to take shape just as Foucault was conceptualising disciplinary normalization".[196] Conversely, in his later works of the 1970s Foucault points out the political and economic relevance neoliberal discourses acquire within post-Fordist societies even before the elections of Thatcher and Regan. Foucault's

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[193] See Dardot and Laval, *The New Way of the World*, especially Part III. On the reduction of the distance of the system of capitalism from individual and social life and its effects on conditions of production and exchange under neoliberalism see Haber, *Penser le néocapitalisme*, especially pp. 213–40.

[194] Davies and Gane, "Interview: William Davies and Nicholas Gane on Neoliberalism", accessible online at http://www.theoryculturesociety.org/interview-william-davies-and-nicholas-gane-on-neoliberalism/.

[195] See Cook, "Foucault and Adorno on Power and Exchange", p. 195.

[196] Fraser, "From Discipline to Flexibilization?", p. 160.

picture of the state as a technology of government helps to explain the redefinition of its prerogatives following the exhaustion of the universalist thrust of the Keynesian project at the basis the welfare state and the institution of decentralized and privatized networks of social regulation, while at the same time "the perspective of governmentality makes possible […] a dynamic form of analysis that does not limit itself to stating the 'retreat of politics' or the 'the domination of the market' but deciphers the so-called 'end of politics' itself as a political program", thus shifting the attention from the power of the economy to the underlying "economy of power" grounded in the regime of veridiction of the market.[197] Accordingly, Foucault is able to show us the fundamental ambivalence of the neoliberal art of government: on the one hand, the latter enhances the individual's freedom in the guise of a responsible self-governance geared to ensure the maximisation of one's human capital through the entrepreneurial management of the risk factors marking the various networks in which the life of the individual itself is divided (work, household, education, insurance, etc.). On the other hand, however, it also promotes invisible modes of "government-at-a-distance"[198], according to which freedom together with security becomes one of the tools for the re-articulation of the two sides of modernity's political bind, i.e. the individualizing power entailed by the free processes of subjectivation of the *homo œconomicus* and the totalizing power exerted by the securitarian *dispositifs* over the risky socio-economic milieu of population.

In conclusion, whereas Adorno provides us with valuable insights into the individual experience of the various forms of social suffering generated by the mechanisms of capitalist domination in its most crushing, violent, and degrading forms, I have showed that Foucault's genealogical history of governmentality constitutes a more

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[197] Lemke, "Comment on Nancy Fraser", pp. 177–78.
[198] See Rose, "Governing 'Advanced' Liberal Democracies".

nuanced and comprehensive account of the techniques of power at play in advanced

liberal societies, whose major merit is to present liberalism and neoliberalism not just

as economic theories but also as political rationalities of government based upon the

adjustment of the liberty and security of each to the liberty and security of all, which

seems to exhaust the space of freedom in modern politics.

Chapter 3
Critique

As we have seen, for Adorno, our modern world is marked by a fundamental antagonism. This thesis can be divided into two sub-theses: (1) social life is wholly determined by the logic of the capitalist exchange principle, whose domination is "irreconcilable with […] the preservation and satisfaction of humankind".[1] (2) The rise of modern capitalist society is predicated upon a pathological mechanism of repression of our instinctual drives, whereby the disenchanted structures of civilisation are unconsciously experienced as expressing the suffering derived from a process of reification that belies the promise of a reconciliation with nature in rational social praxis. Such a bleak picture is the source of many hasty judgements of Adorno's social theory, according to which his lament over the evils afflicting our modern social world would lead him to inhabit what Lukács has called a "Grand Hotel Abyss" deprived of any possible way out. These charges, however, fly in the face of the critical nature of Adorno's project, which is not limited to the examination of empirical and cultural materials in light of their mediation by the social totality, but rather seeks to break the latter's spell so as to reveal the possibilities of its radical transformation:

> If the totality is recognized as a socially necessary semblance, as the hypostasis of the
> universal pressed out of individual human beings; if its claim to be absolute is broken –
> only then will a critical social consciousness retain its freedom to think that things might
> be different some day.[2]

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[1] Adorno *et al.*, *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, p. 27.
[2] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 323.

Demarcating itself from the value-free approach of positivism, in fact, critical theory has to show that the "experience of the blindly dominating totality" goes hand in hand with "the driving desire that it should ultimately become something else".[3] For Adorno, its goal is to entice "a state of consciousness in which one again believes to be contributing something […] to the world's becoming worthy of humans".[4] To this end, as long as the administered world remains antagonistic and material needs are largely unsatisfied[5], critical theory has the task to dispel the "superstition […] of the unconditionality and immutability"[6] of reality, so as to reveal our alienated and ossified social structures for what they are, i.e. not a second nature but rather man-made artefacts which ought to return under the control of humanity in view of a more rational form of self-preservation:

> The deepest promise [philosophical] interpretation makes to the mind is perhaps the assurance it gives that what exists is not the ultimate reality – or perhaps we should say: what exists is not just what it claims to be. […] [It] retains the *possible* life of phenomena as opposed to their actual existence.[7]

Doubtlessly, Adorno's claim about the changeability of the current state of affairs finds a strong echo in the task Foucault assigns to his archaeo-genealogical inquiries, which aim to destabilize the modern power-knowledge deployments in the attempt to "call into question presumptions, practices, rules, institutions and habits that have lain

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[3] Adorno *et al.*, *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, p. 14.
[4] Horkheimer, Adorno, and Kogon, "Die Menschen und der Terror", p. 151.
[5] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 92.
[6] Adorno, *Vermischte Schriften I*, p. 329.
[7] Adorno, *History and Freedom*, p. 138. See also Adorno, "'Static' and 'Dynamic' as Sociological Categories", p. 34, where Adorno describes society as "derived from human relationships" and therefore as intrinsically revocable. Cook develops the idea of a rational course for self-preservation in Cook, *Adorno on Nature*, especially p. 107. I disagree with Jarvis, who thinks that Adorno wanted to dismiss self-preservation *tout court* because now it is self-destructive (Jarvis, *Adorno*, p. 230).

undisturbed for many decades".[8] In this respect, Foucault's archaeological analyses of discursive formations and genealogical examinations of structures of power describe not contradictory but rather complementary axes of investigation[9], whose shared concern consists in showing that "the stultifying aspects of ourselves that we had assumed to be universal and natural might in fact be arbitrary and contingent features that could potentially be changed".[10] Abandoning his previous qualification of his work as that of "a happy positivist"[11] – who detachedly observes the different epistemic configurations marking the history of human knowledge –, in fact, since the 1970s Foucault's upholds that the role of critique is to mount "a challenge to what exists"[12] through the "anti-scientific"[13] work of a historical procedure of inquiry that provides us with a toolbox to diagnose and question who we are, thus generating instabilities and disruptions in the *status quo*:

> I try to conduct the most exact and differential analyses in order to indicate how things change, transform themselves, migrate. […] I'm very careful to get a grip on the actual mechanisms of the exercise of power; I do this because […] I think there are a thousand things that can be done, invented, contrived by those who, recognizing the relations of power in which they are involved, have decided to resist them or escape them. […] I don't construct my analyses in order to say, "This is the way things are, you are trapped". I say these things only insofar as I believe it enables us to transform them. Everything I do is done with the conviction that it may be of use.[14]

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[8] Foucault, "Interview with *Actes*", p. 394.

[9] Davidson, "Archaeology, Genealogy, Ethics", p. 227.

[10] Hoy, *Critical Resistance*, p. 72, text amended.

[11] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 125.

[12] Foucault, "Table ronde du 20 mai 1978", p. 859, my translation.

[13] As historical knowledge of present struggles, genealogy is an anti-science since it enables the "insurrection of subjugated knowledges" (Foucault, "Two Lectures", p. 81), which have been disqualified by the globalizing and hierarchizing effects of power connected to the official scientific discourses.

[14] Foucault, "Interview with Michel Foucault", pp. 294–95, emphasis added.

However, what most commentators have often failed to acknowledge is that Adorno's and Foucault's projects are oriented to show not only *that* our present is contingent but also *how* it has been contingently arisen from a complex set of historical conditions, thus bringing to light the resources we could employ to change that present.[15] This aspect is crucial. If they were only to demonstrate that our present could be changed, their critical import would be on a par with that of postmodern deconstruction for instance. By contrast, the distinctiveness of their philosophical and political enterprises lies in their respective explanations of "how […] a specific historical process has led human beings to develop and embody this […] identity"[16], which encourage the hazardous work of charting paths of radical social transformation. On might reformulate the point by saying that, despite the major differences separating their accounts, Adorno's and Foucault's critical appraisals of the present share a basic intention: contrary to the rationalist framework of contemporary critical theory, they aspire to produce in their addressees a modification of their experience and sensibility, which would enable them not only to recognize the contingent nature of our historical limits but also to disclose alternative forms of social life. The bulk of the present chapter will attempt to back up this claim through a careful examination of Adorno's and Foucault's conceptions of social criticism. Section 1 starts by investigating the multi-layered framework of Adorno's negative dialectics. Firstly, I shall show the problems faced by those lines of interpretation that read Adorno as embracing a form of immanent critique and I shall discuss his mounting scepticism with respect to the viability of this procedure. This will enable

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[15] Recently, Koopman has aptly stressed this distinction with regard to Foucault's genealogy (See Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique*, pp. 129–48). I shall point out what I consider Koopman's shortcoming in the main text below, when discussing Foucault's conception of critical practice.

[16] Geuss, "Genealogy as Critique", p. 211. The distinction between these two dimensions of critical inquiry, so between the demonstration *that* the present is contingent and the historical explanation of *how* it has come about, is purely analytical, since in Adorno's and Foucault's works they always appear as two mutually supporting strategies.

me to shift to Adorno's proposed alternatives. Whereas his first dialectical strand aims to reveal the deceptive appearance of social reality under the spell of exchange, I shall argue that Adorno also endorses a second modality of criticism represented by his method of natural history, whose objective is to give voice to the social-experiential history of suffering at the root of the non-conceptual core of the current predicament in the attempt to foster revolutionary change through praxis. After pointing out the proximity of Adorno's method of natural history to Foucault's genealogy, then, Section 2 will provide a thorough account of Foucault's project of a critical problematization of the present. I shall contend that the latter comprises two dimensions: (1) an archaeo-genealogical diagnosis of the historical problematizations conditioning our practices and (2) a work of radical experimentation capable of devising alternative responses to these very same problematizations. Finally, Section 3 will pull together all the threads in a final comparison aimed at clarifying the distinctive features of Adorno's and Foucault's critical approaches.

1. Social Criticism in Adorno

As Benzer has aptly put it, "Adorno's social critique hinges on two motifs".[17] Firstly, critical theory must lay bare the deceptive image capitalist exchange society gives of itself as "an association of free and autonomous subjects for the sake of the possibility of a better life"[18] while, in reality, its procedures of biopolitical reification produce a condition of physical and psychical torment in which human freedom and happiness are radically undermined. Secondly, critical theory must disclose possibilities of radical social transformation in the attempt "to counter capitulation on

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[17] Benzer, *The Sociology of Theodor Adorno*, p. 125.
[18] Adorno *et al.*, *The Positive Dispute in German Sociology*, p. 25.

the part of those who alone can bring change".[19] Yet, one might wonder whether these two crucial manoeuvres are still viable: indeed, if Auschwitz constitutes not an unexpected relapse into barbarism but rather the failure of our culture as a whole[20], what conceptual resources are we left with to bring thought "thinking against itself"[21]? Notoriously, Adorno's answer to this question consists in his appeal to negative dialectics. Far from describing a dogmatic standpoint or a transferable method, for Adorno, negative dialectics represents an "exercise or regimen"[22] of self-reflection that lies at the root of thought's critical purchase on reality. Negative dialectics designates an alternative way of thinking that, by opposing the positivist ideology accompanying the predominance of our identitarian mode of cognition, seeks to redeem the mutilation inflicted by the progress of civilization – and in particular by the development of modern capitalism – to our own life.[23] To put it differently, as a first approximation, what Adorno wishes to accomplish through negative dialectics is a re-orientation of thought capable of expressing the damage associated with the processes of reification and alienation marking our modern social world, thereby conveying the urgency of its transformation.[24] Excluding any recourse to immediate experience as a privileged modality of apprehension[25], therefore,

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[19] Benzer, *The Sociology of Theodor Adorno*, p. 125.

[20] See Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, pp. 365–68.

[21] Ibid., p. 365.

[22] Apostolidis, "Negative Dialectics and Inclusive Communication", p. 240.

[23] See Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 6.

[24] "What is abandoned [today] is the whole claim and approach to knowledge: to comprehend the directly given as such; not merely to determine the abstract spatio-temporal relations of the fact which allow it just to be grasped, but on the contrary to conceive of them as the superficies, as mediated conceptual moments which come to fulfilment only in the unfolding of the social, historical, and human meaning [*Sinnes*]. The task of cognition does not consist in the mere apprehension, classification, and calculation, but in the determinate negation of each immediacy" (Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, pp. 26–7, Cumming's translation used and amended).

[25] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 15. Contrary to his claim that everything is mediated (see Ibid., pp. 170–72), sometimes Adorno seems to think that there are forms of immediate experience, as in the following passage: "there actually is a mental experience –fallible indeed, but immediate – of the essential and the unessential, an experience which only the scientific need for order can forcibly talk the subjects out of. Where there is no such experience, knowledge stays unmoved and barren. Its measure is what happens objectively to the subjects, as their suffering" (Ibid., pp. 169-170). However,

negative dialectics seeks to make use of concepts to raise in the mind of the allegedly constitutive subject the "consciousness of [the] non-identity"[26] between thought and reality, whose disclosure reveals the misleading nature of the empirical insights into and theoretical reconstructions of our social world.

Now, on my view, what the existing commentaries have failed to appreciate is that Adorno avails himself of different critical strategies to accomplish this project. I have identified three of them, which I shall call respectively "immanent or speculative criticism", "dialectical analysis", and "the method of natural history".[27] To anticipate my argument, according to the first of these paths, Adorno indicts society for falling short of realizing the better potential announced in the emphatic meaning of some of the concepts with which it claims to justify itself. Whereas many interpreters have taken it to be his privileged mode of social critique, I shall show that Adorno raises serious worries about the viability of such a critical procedure within what he reckons the evil context of late capitalist society. In particular, I shall argue that the all-pervasive nature of the capitalist totality renders the identification of elements of immanent transcendence a very dubious enterprise, which might lead critics to appeal to dangerous and ideological social standards. This will allow me to shift to the reconstruction of Adorno's proposed alternatives to immanent criticism. I shall start

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as Freyenhagen has noticed, "there is a sense in which even these 'immediate experiences' are mediated: the ability to have them depends on certain social and biographical conditions, which – in our current social world – are largely missing, so that those who have them only do so as a matter of luck" (Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy*, p. 48, note 64.). On the role of luck in the acquisition of the distance necessary to engage in social criticism, see Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 41. I shall return on the implications of this point in Chapter 4.

[26] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 5, Redmond's translation used.

[27] The general tendency is to reduce Adorno's practice of critique to one of these trends, thereby failing to acknowledge the complexity of his philosophical enterprise. Cook, for instance, largely disregards the critical import of the method of natural history to concentrate on Adorno's appeal to "rational identity" and emphatic concepts (see Cook, *Adorno on Nature*, especially pp. 62–90 and Cook, Adorno, "Ideology and Ideology Critique", especially pp. 5–10). For an opposite reading that identifies negative dialectics only with the method of natural history, instead, see Foster, *Adorno: The Recovery of Experience*, especially 1–30 and (albeit in a less elaborated form) Allen, *The End of Progress*, chapter 5. Similarly, in an otherwise very good article – to which I am indebted –, Baeza strongly denies what I call here Adorno's speculative mode of criticism (see Baeza, "The Normative Role of Negative Affects and Bodily Experience", especially p. 354).

by exploring Adorno's dialectical strand of analysis. I shall argue that the latter describes a form of internal ideology critique, whose aim is to lay bare the deceptive appearance of social reality through the examination of the social and cultural phenomena's contradictory structure as it is determined by the essence of the capitalist exchange principle. Contrary to what some studies have assumed, then, I shall clarify that such a dialectical method is not purely descriptive, but rather expressive of a condemnation of the world as swindle responsible for the intolerable production of false consciousness. Finally, the section will close by showing that Adorno's disgust before the world as swindle already hints at the picture of society Adorno discloses through the method natural history, according to which our affective, bodily experience of the suffering provoked by reification demands practical intervention for change. All of this will set the stage for the second section of the chapter, where I shall offer a comparative appraisal of Adorno's method of natural history and Foucault's genealogical approach. So, let me begin with the analysis of the first of the abovementioned strategies, i.e. Adorno's immanent or speculative criticism. Adorno often embraces immanent critique as the distinctive feature of his philosophical enterprise. Rejecting transcendent standpoints for being "as fictitious as only the construction of abstract utopias can be", for instance, in his essay "Cultural Criticism and Society" Adorno approvingly refers to immanent criticism as that "essentially dialectical" procedure through which one can grasp the "contradiction" between "the objective idea" of intellectual and social phenomena and ideology's "pretension to correspond to reality".[28] Finlayson has correctly

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[28] Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society", pp. 207–08. On Adorno's repudiation of transcendent critique see also Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, p. 146: "Anyone who judges something that has been articulated and elaborated – art or philosophy – by presuppositions that do not hold within it is behaving in a reactionary manner, even when he swears by progressive slogans". Although textual evidence largely supports the interpretation of Adorno as rejecting transcendent criticism, there are divergent passages that run against such a view. In *Negative Dialectics*, for example, he writes that "no

clarified that passages like these signal Adorno's conflation of two different conceptions of immanent criticism, where a commonplace view joins with a more "thick" Hegelian version of it.[29] Far from limiting himself to show the contradictions deriving from the confrontation of culture "with the norms it itself has crystallized"[30], in fact, Adorno mobilizes Hegel's notion of determinate negation in order to obliquely intimate the better potential implicit in in the emphatic, rational content of some of the concepts with which the negative social totality claims to justify itself but fails to embody – such as "freedom", "progress", "democracy", "fair exchange" –, whose normativity might thereby provide a critical standard against the current positivist depiction of the *status quo*.[31] As a result, contrary to what Bernstein maintains[32], Adorno's negative dialectics appears to acquire a speculative orientation: by revealing the discrepancy between society and its concepts, negative dialectics illuminates not only the concepts' unfaithful representation of society, but also society's inadequacy with respect to the utopian dimension of those concepts, which suggests an improved state of affairs where the long denied "pledge that there should be no contradiction, no antagonism" between reality and rationality would finally be

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light falls on men and things without reflecting transcendence" (see ibid., p. 404).

[29] See Finlayson, "Hegel, Adorno and the Origins of Immanent Criticism", pp. 1153–155.

[30] Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society", p. 207.

[31] See Adorno, "Beitrag zur Ideologienlehre", p. 477 and also Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 211. A clear example of this proleptic dimension of Adorno's immanent critique of modern society is provided by his discussion of the concept of freedom. Since I cannot venture to unpack it here due to space constraints, I refer the reader to Cook's presentation of it in "Adorno, Ideology, and Ideology Critique", pp. 7–10. As far as Adorno's and Hegel's positions are concerned, O'Connor has aptly formulated their main difference in the following way: "in Hegel we can move beyond the determinate negation to a newer [and higher as well as truer] understanding of our epistemic commitments. In that sense we move beyond the initial contradiction. For Adorno, however, those contradictions are embedded in history: critique can reveal them, but they persist until society itself has moved beyond them. The only function critique can perform is to reveal that irrationality (contradictoriness): it cannot go with Hegel in thinking that critique is already a step beyond the state of affairs criticized" (O'Connor, *Adorno*, p. 49). That is the reason why Adorno cannot accept Hegel's teleological system, whose absolute hypostatization in his view ends up violating his call for determinate negation (see Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 18). As he briefly puts the point in *Negative Dialectics*, "what is negated is negative until it has passed. This is the decisive break with Hegel" (ibid, p. 160.).

[32] See Bernstein, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics*, pp. 434–35.

realized.[33] In *Negative Dialectics*, for example, Adorno upholds that, "if humanity is to get rid of the coercion to which the form of identification subjects it, it must attain identity with its concept at the same time".[34] To repeat, while warning us against any downright dismissal of ideology[35], negative dialectics gives voice to the "prescriptive truth" of a "nobler condition" inscribed in some of the emphatic concepts advocated by liberal ideology[36], thereby recasting the latter's critical purchase on the present reality:

> The supposition of identity is […] also the truth moment of ideology […]. In the simple identifying judgment, the pragmatist, nature-controlling element already joins with an utopian element. "A" is to be what it is not yet. Such hope is contradictorily tied to the breaks in the form of predicative identity. Philosophical tradition had a word for these breaks: "ideas". […] they are negative signs [that] live in the cavities between what things claim to be and what they are. Utopia would be above identity and above contradiction; it would be a togetherness of diversity.[37]

On Adorno's view, therefore, liberal ideology should not be discarded as merely producing false consciousness. Rather, as Cook puts it, liberal ideology "also provides a basis or foundation"[38] for social criticism: by means of the determinate negation of our historical conditions, it discloses immanent possibilities lying

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[33] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 149. Cook has reformulated the point in the following incisive way: "A critical negation of the existing states of affairs, determinate negation discloses something equally negative: that what exists is not yet what it ought to be, and that what ought to be does not yet exists. In other words, the negation of the negation only yields more negativity" (Cook, *Adorno on Nature*, p. 80).
[34] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 46, translation amended.
[35] See Adorno, "Spengler After the Decline", pp. 65–6.
[36] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, pp. 43–4.
[37] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, pp. 149–50, translation amended. The underlying Platonism of this passage is surely indebted to Benjamin's notion of "idea" as it is elaborated in the "Epistemological-critical prologue" to his *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama*. On Adorno as a "Platonist of the non-identical" see Schnädelbach, "Dialektik als Vernunftkritik", pp. 66–93.
[38] Cook, "Adorno, Ideology and Ideology Critique", p. 10. On the relation between Adorno's thought and liberal ideology see also her "The Rhetoric of Protest: Adorno on the Liberal Democratic Tradition".

unrealized within the strictures of the current predicament, thereby evoking historically conditioned and fragmented ideas about what a different, non-reified state of affairs could and should look like.[39] In brief, as Adorno states in countering Spinoza's belief that truth is an *index sui et falsi*, "the false, once determinately known and precisely expressed, is already an index of what is right and better".[40] Cook is certainly the one who provides us with the clearest gloss of Adorno's speculative modality of critique.[41] According to her reading, negative dialectics identifies what Honneth has called elements of "intramundane transcendence", which is to say positive and immanent resources that might constitute the normative platform not only for the critique of present social practices, but also for the development of political programmes of transformation towards more rational ends.[42] For instance, this is what Adorno has in mind when he speaks of the dialectic intrinsic in the idea of progress:

> The more enhanced the forces of production, the less will the perpetuation of life as an
> end in itself remain a matter of course. The end, as a prey to nature, becomes
> questionable in itself while *the potential of something other is maturing inside it*. Life

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[39] As Elisabeth Pritchard convincingly argues, Adorno employs determinate negation both to "reveal the features of damaged life that pre-empt redemption" and to "indicate something determinate about that redemption, without thereby presuming its immanent arrival" (Pritchard, "Bilderverbot meets Body in Adorno's Inverse Theology", p. 193). Accordingly, on my view, Hammer is misguided when he argues that determinate negation provides us – a priori, as it were – with an indubitable and irrefutable image of the utopian redemption (see Hammer, *Adorno and the Political*, p. 85); the operation wielded by determinate negations is always a historically situated one, whereby the concept of an alternative order can never be grasped *in toto* (on this point see also Cook, *Adorno on Nature*, especially p. 79).

[40] Adorno, *Critique*, p. 288. Similarly, demarcating his position from Hegel's in *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno writes that their disagreement consists in "whether consciousness, theoretically and in the resulting practice, would like to maintain identity as the ultimate, as the absolute and reinforce it, or else become aware of it as the universal mechanism of coercion, which it ultimately requires in order to escape from the universal compulsion, just as *freedom can become real only through coercive civilization*, not by way of a *retour à la nature*" (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 147, Redmond's translation used and modified, emphasis added).

[41] Very similar readings, albeit less developed, are given in Rose, *The Melancholy Science*, especially p. 43; Pickford, "The Dialectic of Theory and Praxis", pp. 323–25; and Jarvis, *Adorno*, pp. 50–1.

[42] See Honneth, *Disrespect*, p. 64.

gets ready to become a means for that otherness, however undefined and unknown it may be.[43]

Despite its prima facie plausibility and the support this interpretation can find in the text, however, Cook fails to acknowledge that on Adorno's view the theoretical and practical success of what I have called immanent or speculative criticism becomes highly dubious in the context of late capitalist society. There are a number of reasons for this: (1) if society is showed to be incapable of observing its own immanent norms, society can arrive at the conclusion that the norms themselves should be discarded.[44] This is precisely what has happened with the passage Adorno often recalls from liberal to positivist ideology. While liberal ideology still includes a normative, "rational element on the basis of which critique can be levelled"[45], positivist ideology, "even in its most radical lie, falls back on the argument that things are like this, a simple finding, which coincides, for it, with the good"[46], thereby obstructing any viable way for immanent critique. (2) Notwithstanding the erosion of the discrepancy between what is and what ought to be, even in all those cases in which Adorno proceeds along the line of a speculative and immanent critique of our social order, he does not confine himself to advocating the fulfilment of liberal ideals. Rather, their realization is just the minimal requisite for genuine freedom.[47] (3) More crucially, the subordination of all aspects social reality to the logic of capitalist exchange renders the identification of elements of intramundane transcendence a

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[43] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 349, emphasis added. See also: "While the perpetual oppression that unleashed progress always arrested it at the same time, this oppression – as the emancipation of consciousness – first made the antagonism and the full extent of the deception recognizable, [and this is] the prerequisite for settling the antagonism" (Adorno, "Progress", p. 150, translation amended).

[44] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 93. A similar point is made in Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy*, pp. 14–5.

[45] Adorno, "Beitrag zur Ideologienlehre", p. 465, my translation.

[46] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 211.

[47] For instance, according to Adorno, a truly free society would be marked not only by the actualization of the liberal utopia of free and fair exchange, but also by the abolition of exchange itself (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 147).

highly suspicious enterprise. If speculative thinking has to retain its critical purchase, critique must be able to separate out the normative truth-content of concepts from the socially conditioned false components that have tainted them.[48] Indeed, unless critique is able to carry out this task, we risk levelling "an illegitimate condemnation of society with reference to misguided utopian notions or, worse, a potentially dangerous promotion of these notions as standards for social transformation".[49] However, according to Adorno, the social order has become so impenetrable and perverted that it is unlikely such a demarcation will ever work out. To return to his conception of freedom, for instance, the latter can be hardly teased out from the elements of social coercion that have historically accumulated in its concept: "freedom itself is so tangled up with unfreedom, that it is not merely inhibited by the latter, but has it as the condition of its own concept. This is no more to be separated out as an absolute than any other individual one".[50] Adorno's speculative thinking, then, represents at best a blunt weapon, because it can hardly identify pure features of transcendence amidst our total context of delusion. Yet, this does not mean that social criticism is hopelessly doomed to failure. Rather, the limitations of speculative thought motivate Adorno to devise alternative possibilities of critique, whose practicality does not depend on the appeal to normative concepts.

Often overlooked in the existing commentaries[51], the first option consists in what I

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[48] "Ideas in their abstract form do not simply represent regulative truths but are themselves afflicted with the injustice under whose spell they were conceived" (Adorno, "Spengler After the Decline", p. 66).

[49] Benzer, *The Sociology of Theodor Adorno*, p. 136.

[50] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 265, Redmond's translation used. More generally, on Adorno's view, negative dialectics is "the ontology of the wrong state of things" (Ibid., p. 11), which as a form of immanent critique finds its limit in the fact that its "law […] is ultimately one with the delusion that has to be overcome" (Ibid., p. 182).

[51] A very brief examination can be found in Pickford, "The Dialectic of Theory and Praxis", p. 323. Nevertheless, on my view, Pickford wrongly describes this critical axis as a form of genealogy, while totally disregarding what I consider the authentic genealogical component of Adorno's project, i.e. his method of natural history (more on this below). Surely more helpful is Baeza's explanation in *Contradiction, Critique and Dialectic in Adorno*, chapter 4. My disagreement with Baeza's account will become clear later in the text.

have labelled Adorno's strand of dialectical analysis. The dialectical nature of this approach marks a certain proximity to the immanent or speculative modality of critique analysed previously. Like the latter, Adorno's dialectical method takes the shape of a evaluative judgement based on determinate negation, which following the targeted object seeks to reveal the contradictions of a given theoretical position, social form, or cultural product. However, whereas immanent or speculative criticism operates by introducing a dimension of transcendence, the aim of Adorno's mode of dialectical reflection is to explain the heteronomous structures of thought and reality starting from what he calls "the contradiction in the object".[52] When he speaks of "the contradiction in the object" Adorno refers to the contradictory division between a realm of essence and a realm of appearance, which results from the deceitful nature of the exchange abstraction. As Baeza has emphasized, following broadly Hegelian-Marxian lines, for Adorno such a contradiction amounts to a relation of mediation. "The sphere of essence", i.e. the sphere of society as wholly determined by the logic of the exchange principle, "is essentially distortion-producing: the essence of social reality is only essence by giving rise to a distorted appearance that in turn maintains the essence in place as *essence*".[53] Moving beyond the level of ordinary and positivist consciousness, then, Adorno upholds that the first goal of critical theory is to expose reality as distorted appearance historically produced by the principle of exchange, thus bringing to light our blind subordination to the fetish of its spell. But let me

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[52] Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, p. 9.
[53] Baeza, *Contradiction, Critique and Dialectic in Adorno*, p. 162. Indeed, Adorno argues that "the subjective modes of behaviour in modern societies are dependent on objective social structures to a degree that is largely unsuspected by most people, and that in consequence we may think of such subjective behaviour as the mere appearance of those structures. […] On the other hand, however, this appearance is also *necessary*, that is to say, it lies in the nature of society to produce the contents of the minds of human beings, just as it is the nature of society to ensure that they are blind to the fact that they mistake what is mediated and determined for actuality or the property of their freedom, and treat them as absolutes. It follows that since the immediate consciousness of human beings is socially necessary illusion, it is in great measure *ideology*" (Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, p. 100, translation amended).

clarify how this demystifying procedure works by way of an example. Take Adorno's discussion of the Kantian distinction between transcendental and empirical subjectivity in his 1969 essay "Subject and Object". Adorno begins by considering the idealist doctrine of transcendental subjectivity as the constituting ground of all experience. Premised upon a neat dichotomy between logical validity and genesis, for Adorno, such a historical view illicitly assigns priority to what is actually thinkable only as the derived result of a process of abstraction from empirical subjectivity[54], a process motivated by the ideological attempt to create a compensatory mechanism for the unfreedom of empirical individuals under the political and social compulsion of the modern machinery of capitalism.[55] Similarly, if the notion of transcendental subjectivity needs to pass over into its dialectical contrary to be meaningful at all, Adorno claims that the notion of empirical subjectivity does not stand for a living and substantial selfhood, but rather refers us back to the transcendental role acquired by the all-encompassing subject of the modern social totality in the production of individuals as deadened appendages of the capitalist process of production[56], whose constraining operations are concealed behind the false appearance generated by the bourgeois ideology of monadic individualism.[57] Hence, fully guided by the object of thought, the aim of the dialectical axis of Adorno's criticism is to show society's deceitfulness by disclosing the socio-historical mediations of the objects and the way

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[54] See also Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 147.

[55] Adorno, "Subject and Object", p. 141.

[56] "In a sense, […] the transcendental subject is more real – that is to say, more determinant for the real conduct of people and society – than those psychological individuals from whom the transcendental subject was abstracted. They have little to say in the world, having on their part turned into appendages of the social apparatus and ultimately into ideology. The living human individual, as he is forced to act in the role for which he has been marked internally as well, is the *homo œconomicus* incarnate, closer to the transcendental subject than to the living individual for which he immediately cannot but take himself. To this extent, […] its [transcendental consciousness'] solidity and invariance […] are the reflective form of the reification of humans that has been objectively accomplished in the social relationship. The fetish character, a socially necessary semblance, has historically turned into the *prius* of what according to its concept would have it to be the *posterius*. The philosophical problem of constitution has reversed into its mirror image; but in this reversal, it tells the truth about the historic stage that has been reached" (Adorno, "Subject and Object", pp. 141–42, translation amended).

[57] Adorno elaborates on the last point elsewhere, especially in Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, pp. 148–50.

they are reproduced as inconsistencies at the ordinary level of our conceptual system. That is the reason why Adorno connects critical theory to the unfulfilled project of enlightenment, which as a "form of disenchantment […] must necessarily desire to liberate human beings from such a spell – formerly from that of the demons, nowadays from the spell which human relations exerts on them".[58] Unquestionably, the demythologizing activity of critical theory does not bring the domination by exchange relations to an end.[59] Nonetheless, by enabling the formation of a new understanding of social reality as a reified totality, critical theory unravels its semblance as second nature and lays bare its historical contingency, thereby opening up the possibility for change. As a result, on my view, Baeza is mistaken when she argues that Adorno's strand of dialectical analysis can yield only a descriptive model of our social order, which she sees as *always* combined with a second prescriptive model afforded by Adorno's method of natural history.[60] Rather, although he excludes the appeal to a rational principle of order, most of Adorno's sociological writings belie the crucial claim of Baeza's interpretation by attesting to the self-sufficiency of dialectics as a critical strategy, whose condemnation of capitalist society expresses "the disgust before the world as swindle [*Ekel vor der Welt als Schwindel*]" fostering false representations in order to chain individuals to the current predicament.[61]

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[58] Adorno, "On the Logic of Social Sciences", p. 121–22, translation amended.
[59] Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society", pp. 208–09.
[60] See Baeza, "The Normative Role of Negative Affects and Bodily Experience", especially p. 356 and p. 362.
[61] Adorno, "Late Capitalism or Industrial Society?", p. 9, translation amended. One, for instance, could briefly consider Adorno's discussion of the relationship between labour time and free time. Whatever we consider such a relationship to be, Adorno contends, immanent dialectical analysis shows us that its theoretical account as determined by the capitalist logic of exchange contradicts the conceptual picture of it we form in our ordinary consciousness. More specifically, Adorno is fully aware that his immediate perception of work and leisure as indistinct is just the untrustworthy result derived from his privileged and fortunate position within the framework of the capitalist division between intellectual and manual labour (Adorno, "Free Time", pp. 168–69). Conversely, the common view of them as separated is also misleading: while reification organizes spare-time according to the profitable logic of culture industry, the misguided sense of spontaneity leisure and sports convey covers up the essence of

However, it is my contention that one can fully appreciate the stakes involved in Adorno's picture of the social world as a disgusting swindle only by considering his second alternative to immanent or speculative criticism, i.e. what I have called Adorno's "method of natural history". Aimed at delivering critical resources internal to our context of delusion, the latter method finds its conceptual motivation in the results of Adorno's internal type of ideology critique just examined. This first procedure, in fact, shows that the modern social order does not respond to rational development but rather to the principle of capitalist exchange, which lies at the root of the object's appearance as a "riddle" in need of decipherment.[62] Through the method of natural history, then, such a decipherment takes the shape of an interpretative enterprise geared to show how the object under examination has historically assumed its present problematic configuration. That does not amount (at least not primarily) to an exploration of the conceptual meanings an object has accumulated through its successive receptions in various historical cultures (tainted as they are by the social totality), but rather to the investigation of the non-conceptual, socio-experiential context of the object's origin, whose traces still survive – albeit as an unconscious trace – in the object's present conceptual form. As Foster has clarified, Adorno describes such a context in terms of the suffering caused by the

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free time as "an unmediated continuation" of the workday geared to ensure the reproduction and enhancement of individuals' productive fitness and the functionalization of their body within the collective (Ibid., p. 173). Here, *pace* Baeza, Adorno does not present any natural-historical motives in support of his argument. Rather, his critique involves a purely dialectical argument against society's prevaricating falsehood, which aims "to reveal how little the concept which capitalist society has of itself has to do with reality" (Adorno, "Late Capitalism or Industrial Society?", p. 9, translation amended).

[62] As Adorno contends in his 1931 inaugural lecture at the University of Frankfurt "The Actuality of Philosophy", since "no justifying reason could rediscover itself in a reality whose order and form supress any claim to reason" (Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy", p. 24), today the task of philosophy is to solve "the riddle figures of that which exists" by providing an interpretation capable of reconstructing the historical processes that have led to the bewildering fragmentation of present phenomena: "The text which philosophy has to read is incomplete, contradictory, and fragmentary, and much in it may be delivered up to blind demons; in fact perhaps the reading of it is our task precisely so that we, by reading, can better learn to recognize the demonic forces and to banish them" (Ibid., p. 31).

pathological relationship between nature and mind at the source of the process of modern disenchantment, whereby the goal of the method of natural history is to give voice to "world's agony" as it is expressed in our affective experience of its "scars"[63], i.e. of the conceptual tensions in the object under scrutiny which replicate the contradictory structure of the real.[64] To this end, Adorno's method of natural history interprets phenomena so as *to comprehend historical being in its most extreme historical determinacy, where it is most historical, as natural being* and *to comprehend nature as a historical being where it seems to rest most deeply in itself as nature*.[65] On the one hand, natural history seeks to unearth the historically contingent processes responsible for the emergence of our reified and estranged reality as a second nature that "cannot be decoded but encounters us as ciphers".[66] On the other hand, discharging positive narratives of historical progress, natural history also show that "everything historical has to be regarded as nature because, thanks to its violent origins, it remains under the spell of blind nature"[67], namely under the sway of the doom-laden "principle of unreflected self-preservation".[68] Based upon a melancholy immersion into phenomena, therefore, Adorno's method of natural history operates a shocking "change of perspective"[69], through which modern disenchantment becomes accessible as a *Leidensgeschichte*, a history of suffering that cries for redemptive transformation. Again, a concrete example might help clarify how this procedure actually works. This time I wish to draw the reader's attention to Adorno's metacritique of Kant's Third Antinomy as it is presented in his 1964–65

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[63] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 6. See also Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, p. 39.
[64] See Foster, *Adorno: The Recovery of Experience*, pp. 23–6.
[65] Adorno, "The Idea of Natural-History", p. 260.
[66] Ibid., p. 261.
[67] Adorno, *History and Freedom*, p. 124. See also Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 355: "Human history, the history of the progressing mastery of nature, continues the unconscious history of [first] nature, of devouring and being devoured".
[68] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 283.
[69] Adorno, "The Idea of Natural-History", p. 261.

lecture course on *History and Freedom* and further elaborated in *Negative Dialectics*.[70] In accordance with the thesis of Kant's antinomy, "a causality through freedom"[71] must supplement the causality of nature in order to account for the totality of appearances in the world. Nevertheless, this thesis contrasts with the antithetical claim that "everything in the world takes place solely in accordance with laws of nature"[72], whereby a causality through freedom is neither necessary nor possible. Being aware that without the transcendental freedom affirmed in the thesis we would be left with no ground on the basis of which to explain moral responsibility and human agency, Kant notoriously suggests as a resolution of the antinomy to distinguish between appearances and things in themselves: whereas the empirical world is structured according to the causality of nature, human beings must also be regarded as free beings "belonging to the intelligible world".[73] The division proposed by such a resolution, however, generates the formalism of Kant's incompatibilist conception of freedom, whose rigorist inflection dictates that our actions acquire moral value out of respect for *a priori* legislated universalizable moral maxims, without empirical and hedonistic motivations playing any determining role. To begin with, following Lukács's reading of it, Adorno's interprets Kant's antinomy between transcendental freedom and natural necessity as reproducing the *a posteriori* contradictions of modern reified society, in which subjects experience themselves as both free and unfree.[74] Indeed, early modern philosophy's attempt to provide a transparent ground for freedom represents the theoretical transposition of the bourgeoisie's political interest in its own emancipation vis-à-vis the state and feudal

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[70] Again here, I shall not discuss the cogency of Adorno's interpretation of Kant. On the fruitfulness of Adorno's metacritique of freedom see Jütten, "Adorno on Kant, Freedom and Determinism". For an extensive reconstruction of Adorno's critique of Kant's moral philosophy, see Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy*, Chapters 4, 5 and Appendix.

[71] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason (B)*, p. 472.

[72] Ibid., p. 473.

[73] Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 452.

[74] See Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 299.

aristocracy, an interest that is "antinomian through and through".[75] Among the reasons why he thinks the bourgeoisie's attitude towards freedom is antagonistic, Adorno mentions the role played by the principle of rationality, and more specifically by law, not only in the fight against traditional domination but also in the promotion of a new form of oppression.[76] On the one hand, as the essential condition of freedom, rationality fosters all those values – like autonomy, independence, and enterprise – that bourgeois modernity opposes to feudal dependencies. On the other, rationality also bolsters domination because freedom is predicated upon the repression of human beings' non-rational and sensuous nature, whereby conformity to a universally binding moral law comes to be equivalent to the individuals' internalized adaptation to the social norms of the modern bourgeois order.[77] Thus, as a result of the immanent dimension of dialectical analysis, Adorno shows that the contradictions expressed in Kant's Third Antinomy reflect the contradictions developed on the basis of the social antagonisms marking the nascent capitalist structure of bourgeois society.[78] Though, for Adorno, the task of philosophy does not stop here. Philosophy does not simply "raise such contradictions to the level of

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[75] Adorno, *History and Freedom*, p. 195.

[76] See Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 214.

[77] See Ibid., pp. 241 and 256. That is why, explaining his conception of will formation, Adorno can write that "what has been objectified in human beings on the basis of their reflexes and in response to them, character or will, the potential organ of freedom, also undermines freedom, because it embodies the principle of domination to which human beings progressively succumb. Identity of the self and alienation from the self go hand in hand from the beginning", (Ibid., pp. 216–17).

[78] See Adorno, *History and Freedom*, p. 196. In another series of lectures devoted to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Adorno points out the relevance of this type of dialectical analysis for the interpretation of objects such as philosophical and more generally cultural productions: "philosophy directs its efforts precisely towards the recuperation of what has been lost through this conceptual cleansing operation, this so-called contradiction-free, bland presentation of philosophical problems. This appears to me to provide the profoundest reason, the deepest justification of the claim that the philosophical interpretation of a text should focus less on the absence of contradictions, less on systematic consistency, than on its opposite, on the contradictions themselves. The aim should be not to nag away at these contradictions, but to discover the fissures, the chinks, that – if I may use an image from mountain-climbing – enable us to get a foothold and eventually to reach the peak from where we can obtain a freer view of whatever intellectual panorama we are examining" (Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 82).

consciousness", but rather seeks to "understand their meaning"[79] by disclosing the objective social-experiential ground in light of which they first take shape. Specifically, in the case under examination, Adorno ties Kant's antinomy between freedom and necessity to the modern individual's experience of alienation and powerlessness in the face of a disenchanted and estranged world, an experience that is accompanied by a profound sense of guilt:

> The more freedom the subject – and the community of subjects – ascribes to itself, the greater its responsibility; and before this responsibility it must fail in a bourgeois life which in practice has never endowed a subject with the unabridged autonomy accorded to it in theory. *Hence the subject must feel guilty*. What makes the subjects aware of the bounds of their freedom is that they are part of nature, and finally, that they are powerless against society which has become independent of them.[80]

From this perspective, it is not difficult to understand why Kant opts for an incompatibilist conception of freedom: lacking material embodiment, freedom is expunged from the socio-historical world and relegated into the intelligible realm, where no empirical obstacle risks threatening its existence. Reflecting the antagonistic conditions of modern society, however, this rigid demarcation is not so much the result of Kant's intention, but rather arises from human beings' reified experience within modern society as an alienated second nature, an experience that finds its expression in the repressed, neurotic features of modern individuals "who act not out of a genuine sense of what is right, but because his or her impulses are compulsively curbed by a blind demand to remain in conformity with the law".[81]

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[79] Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 82.
[80] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 221, emphasis added.
[81] Hammer, *Adorno and the Political*, p. 116. On the neurotic experience of the modern subject see Adorno, *History and Freedom*, pp. 217–18.

Indeed, as I argued in Chapter 1, Adorno thinks that the figure of the transcendental and constitutive subject in the late 18th and 19th century philosophical systems of Kant and German Idealism marks the last stage of regression in the pathological relationship between reason and nature Adorno sees at the core of the whole history of civilization. On his view, such a stage derives from the confluence of two different but interrelated historically contingent events: on the one hand, despite the technological advance of productive forces, the bourgeois promises of happiness and freedom have been thwarted by the means-ends reversal imposed by the development of capitalism for its own sake, whereby human being's primordial repression of their wish for reconciliation with nature can no longer be vindicated in view of a future form of compensation in social praxis.[82] On the other, any attempt to change the social world geared to attain at least a partial satisfaction of human wishes has miscarried, as it is paradigmatically exemplified by the failure of Marxism to revolutionize the *status quo*.[83] As a result, deepening human beings' estrangement from nature, modern individuals are induced to reinforce the pathological mechanism of satisfaction Adorno sees at the root of identity thinking, i.e. the system of narcissistic delusion according to which the paranoid projection of nature as an external otherness is paralleled by the definitive exaltation of mind as the creative source of a contradiction-free and rational world. Through such a delusional system, however, the bourgeois mind achieves "not freedom […] but only its caricature".[84] While modern society no longer responds to the original motivation of repression, reason forgets its natural imprint and turns into "self-preservation running wild", thereby sanctioning its subordination to the alleged menace of an ever-returning

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[82] "The way of civilization has been that of obedience and work, over which fulfilment shines everlastingly as mere illusion, as beauty deprived of power" (Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 26).

[83] See Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 3.

[84] Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, p. 124, translation amended.

nature that need to be repressed in order for its delusional system to function. As a historico-philosophical inquiry into its unreflected conditions of possibility, therefore, the point of Adorno's metacritique of Kant's practical philosophy is to bring this natural history to awareness: by interpreting its conceptual contradictions as the pathological symptom of the damage experience undergoes through modern disenchantment, the method of natural history lends a voice to the "unintentional reality"[85] buried in Kant's text, namely to the objective, socio-historical experience of suffering and guilt that its conceptual structure covers up and that makes itself felt in the neuroses we all (at least to some extent) endure. More generally, Adorno's method of natural history moves from the diagnosis of the conceptual tensions of the object as perplexing problems in need of a solution to the interpretation of the non-conceptual relation linking the object's contradictions to the socio-historical experience of their context of emergence as it has unconsciously sedimented in the object.[86] By giving expression to the social experience of suffering and repression at

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[85] Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy", p. 32.

[86] Closely following Foster's excellent study of Adorno's method of natural history, Baeza considers another example, namely Adorno's discussion of Kant's dualism of phenomenon and noumenon as it is elaborated in his lectures on *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (see in particular Baeza, "The Normative Role of Negative Affects and Bodily Experience in Adorno", pp. 359–61). It might be helpful to recall it briefly. Adorno starts by examining the phenomenal object. According to him, Kant's constructs the identity of the object as the lawfulness of its appearances, whereby the phenomenon is turned into a mere projection of the cognitive structures of the subject's intellect. In order to think of the object as independent from the subject, Kant introduces the notion of the thing-in-itself. The latter, however, denotes an unknowable dimension, which stands as a consolation of the mind for the absence of external objectivity. This means that whatever pole of the dualism we take up, for Adorno, we are bounced back to Kant's notion of the subject. But Adorno's analysis does not stop at this level. Rather, as we have seen in Chapter 1, Adorno claims that Kant's conception of the subject is modelled after his conception of the object, whose self-identical structure is paralleled by the immutable and rigid structure of the subject. Hence, far from being able to clarify the cognitive relation between subject and object, Kant's theory ends up producing a perplexing series of dialectical contradictions, which reflect the real contradictions affecting the reified order of modern capitalist society, where individuals are objectified and commodities expropriate the role of the subject. The point, then, becomes that of deciphering this riddle by elaborating a natural-historical interpretation of the non-conceptual, socio-experiential ground of intelligibility of Kant's distinction between noumena and phenomena. In this sense, Adorno argues that "the objective motif" behind such dualism is a an experience of "metaphysical alienation", anxiety, and claustrophobia in the face of a commensurable and familiar but meaningless and despairful world, an experience that – if properly expressed – provides the reader with a bodily rendition of the sorrowful mutilation inflicted upon our life by the modern process of disenchantment (Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. 110–11).

origin of the object, this theoretical move enables Adorno to supply the reader with a bodily cognition of the affective dimension of our own history as we can feel it in our encounter with the object, thereby showing that the latter's conceptual tensions call not for theoretical solutions but rather for revolutionary praxis:

> The interpretation of a given reality and its abolition are connected to each other, not, of course, in the sense that reality is negated in the concept, but that out of the construction of a configuration of reality the demand for its [reality's] real change always follows promptly. [...] Only in the annihilation of the question is the authenticity of philosophical interpretation first successfully proven, and mere thought by itself cannot accomplish this [authenticity]: therefore the annihilation of the question compels praxis.[87]

Once adequately disclosed, the affective content of the object cannot but help urging the reader to intervene in order to change a world that ought not to be as it is, thereby negating "the suffering brought on by social coercion"[88] and the domination of nature. In other terms, for Adorno, the meaning of the social contradictions reproduced in the object's conceptual tension is a bodily experience that reveals how the world has become a source of physical and psychical torture for the body, whose suffering does not need argumentative demonstration but rather impels transformative intervention. That is the reason why, in accordance with his materialism, Adorno thinks theory is always accompanied by a bodily addendum, which enables its passage into praxis: piercing through the abstract and false mediation of the world by conceptual categories, the addendum allows the subject to gain a somatic experience

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[87] Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy", p. 34. On this connection to the question of revolutionary praxis see also Pensky, "Natural History", pp. 234–35. These lines support Allen's reading when she claims that Adorno endorses a problematizing modality of critique (see Allen, *The End of Progress*, chapter 5). Still, without an adequate account of his method of natural history, Allen remains unable to explain the features that make Adorno's critique an act of problematization, through which he discloses the riddles marking the present and interprets them as problems demanding not a theoretical solution but a practical one.

[88] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 223.

of the world as the outcome of a long unheard history of suffering, which provides its cognitive structures with an indisputable justification for action, i.e. empathic "solidarity with […] tormentable bodies".[89] One might still wonder, however, what makes this disclosure possible. Adorno excludes the possibility that it is a matter of pure intuition. Rather, he claims that "the history locked in the object can only be delivered by a knowledge mindful of the historic positional value of the object in its relation to other objects"[90], namely by what Adorno – following Benjamin – calls "constellations". Conceived along Weber's ideal type[91], the latter notion refers to an interpretative construction of reality, which associates concepts in a non-systematic and exaggerated way in order to "form an asymptotic approximation"[92] to the non-conceptual substance of the object, thereby expressing the experiential content of its natural history through the rhetorical and mimetic function of language.[93] In this respect, a constellation is a right "combination of numbers" which unlocks the "well-guarded safe-deposit box"[94] of an object: revealing the latter's historical mediations through the appropriate disposition of tightly interweaved concepts, the arrangement of a constellation amounts to an "*ars inveniendi*" based on fantasy, whose success

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[89] Ibid., p. 286. On the "outrage" of dealing discursively with the experience of suffering, see Adorno remarks on the "new categorical imperative" imposed by Auschwitz in Ibid., p. 365.

[90] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 163.

[91] Ibid., p. 164. Commenting on Adorno's debt towards Weber, Axel Honneth writes that in "Weber's essay "Objectivity", we read, in almost word-for-word agreement with Adorno, that the ideal type should be understood as 'the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena into a unified thought construct'" (Honneth, "A Physiognomy of the Capitalist Form of Life", p. 53).

[92] Kaufmann, "Correlations, constellations and the Truth", p. 69.

[93] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 55. As Bernstein has insightfully argued, what he terms Adorno's "reasoning in transition" reproduces the same movement of Kant's reflective judgment: from the experience of an object for which we do not yet have an adequate concept to the formation of a new concept capable of conveying its meaning (Bernstein, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics*, pp. 308–43). Nevertheless, I agree with Baeza when she claims that "it is more accurate to see the method of constellations as a movement in the opposite direction from that of the reflective judgement: not trying to find new concepts for the experience of the object, but rather trying to break through the concepts in the object in order to exhibit the experience that first gave rise to those concepts" (Baeza, *Contradiction, Critique, and Dialectic in Adorno*, p. 357 note 318).

[94] Ibid., p. 163. See also Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy", p. 35: "The point of interpretative philosophy is to construct keys, before which reality springs open. As to the size of the key categories, they are specifically made to order".

depends upon its capacity to instil in the reader the same experiential, affective content enclosed in the object under examination and to dissolve its riddle-*Gestalt*.[95] Put differently, questioning the authority of our discursively and conceptually reified practices, Adorno employs constellations to convey the negative experience of our encounter with the object as the mute and opaque symptom of a natural historical process of estrangement and repression, an experience that entails a bodily disgust for the injustice of the totally integrated world deciphered by constellations as well as the awareness of the urgency of its transformation. Hence Adorno's method of natural history configures itself as a history of the present, whose partisan and fallible interpretation of the socio-experiential content of society's dialectical contradictions opens up displacing possibilities in search of a better future.

2. Genealogy as Critical Problematization

Now, if that is true, Adorno's method of natural history bears a remarkable affinity to Foucault's genealogical approach. Foucault's critical inquiries, in fact, are meant likewise to be histories of the present, which is to say histories that generate "an interference between our reality and what we know about our history"[96] as an intervention geared to shape an alternative future.[97] While critical interpretation in Adorno's method aims at "mobilizing in phenomena that by which they have become, and thereby recognizing the possibility that they might have become, and could therefore be, something different"[98], Foucault's genealogy seeks to trace the

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[95] Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy", p. 37.

[96] Foucault, "Foucault étudie la raison d'État", p. 859, my translation.

[97] Foucault explicitly claims, for instance, that this is precisely the sense of his 1975 book *Discipline and Punish*, whose detailed reconstruction of the birth of prison amounts to a history of modern punishment: "I would like to write the history of this prison […] Why? Simply because I am interested in the past? No, if one means by that writing a history of the past in terms of the present. Yes, if one means writing the history of the present" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 30–1).

[98] Adorno, *Introduction to Sociology*, p. 150.

"singularity of events […] in what we tend to feel is without history"[99], thereby challenging the ostensible naturalness of our practices and the historical narrative of progress shoring them up. To this end, opposing itself to the search of metaphysical "origins" [*Ursprünge*] as the secret, pure, and timeless essence of things as well as to the presentist fallacy implicit in any finalism, Foucault's genealogy "studies what is closest, but in an abrupt dispossession, so as to reveal it at a distance"[100] by exposing its historical descent [*Herkunft*] and emergence [*Entstehung*] – two elements that stand for the counterparts of the natural and historical components of Adorno's method respectively. Indeed, by the notion of *Herkunft* Foucault means "the affiliation to a group" based on bloodlines, tradition, or social status, whose complex and dispersed historical dynamics and events have given rise "to those things which continue to exist and have value for us". Following Nietzsche, Foucault upholds that this myriad of historical events and past experiences – as well the affirmations of value that are associated with them – leave a trace in the concrete life of the bodies, in their weaknesses, strengths, instincts, and desires, whereby as an analysis of provenance "genealogy […] is situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history's destruction of the body".[101] Aimed at retrieving our forgotten past, such an analysis has its parallel in Adorno's history of nature, which shows how the "archaic, natural material of history"[102] persistently conditions our present living experience in the primary form of the doom-laden principle of unreflected self-preservation at the root of bodily suffering. For Adorno, however, "history is the unity of continuity and

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99 Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", p. 369.
100 Ibid., p. 382.
101 See Ibid., 370–76. "Descent attaches itself to the body. It inscribes itself in the nervous system, in temperament, in the digestive apparatus; it appears in faulty respiration, in improper diets, in the debilitated and prostrate bodies of those whose ancestors committed errors" (see Ibid., pp. 375).
102 Adorno, "The Idea of Natural-History", p. 266.

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discontinuity"[103], whereby his account cannot be restricted to the analysis of the way in which the dimension of nature determines the psycho-dynamics of our historical epoch as they are expressed in individuals' instincts, desires, and unconscious patterns of behaviour. Indeed, Adorno holds that history can be understood only as the mediation of this first dimension with a second properly historical level[104], according to which the pathological configuration of modernity represents not the necessary result of the progress of civilisation from its primordial beginnings but rather the contingent product of the confluence of historically specific events – like the rise of bourgeois society, the development of capitalism, the failure of Marxist revolutions, and the affirmation of the positivist world view of modern science. This second layer of Adorno's conception of natural history corresponds to what Foucault defines as genealogical "*Entstehung*", i.e. the contingent emergence of a specific historical phenomenon that "does not conform to the successive configurations of an identical meaning". *Entstehung* refers to the arising of a new phenomenon in the course of history as the outgrowth of a multitude of aleatory displacements, errors, unsteadily victorious forces, petty malice, and conflicting plays of power, which again engrave themselves in "the memories of things and […] within bodies".[105] As Baeza remarks, therefore, Adorno's and Foucault's methods share a basic genealogical orientation: "by looking at how the archaic [*Herkunft*] returns in history and how the contingent gives rise to something new [*Entstehung*]"[106], they provide us with a diagnostic dissection of the present as arising from a reciprocally mediated series of historical continuities and discontinuities, thereby rendering intelligible and criticisable the depth processes of power-knowledge at the basis of the practices,

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[103] Ibid., p. 320.
[104] Adorno, "The Idea of Natural-History", p. 264.
[105] Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", p. 377, translation amended.
[106] See Baeza, *Contradiction, Critique and Dialectic in Adorno*, pp. 297–98.

discourses, and institutions constraining who we are. In this sense, Adorno's and Foucault's critical histories reactivate Nietzsche's well-known figure of the philosophical physician, who with his surgical knife cuts the commonly accepted evidence in order to reveal the pathologies afflicting our social, cultural, and political experience as well as their potential remedies.[107] On my view, however, whereas their analyses present a common genealogical structure, there are remarkable dissimilarities in the stories Adorno and Foucault tells us. Put otherwise, despite their shared picture of critique as a genealogical practice of reflection oriented to emancipation, my contention is that Adorno's and Foucault's enterprises are marked by distinct epistemological sensibilities, which reflect the different targets of their critique. In order to clarify this claim, let me start by emphasising what I reckon to be the most serious limitation of Baeza's interpretation. From my perspective, what Baeza fails to recognize is the repetitious and gestural character of Adorno's natural history, whose narrative ends up impairing the genealogical framework of his own method. Indeed, although he rejects any negative, teleological reading of Western civilisation, Adorno seems to maintain that the ultimate reason why modern society is pathological should be traced to the fact that the historical events behind its contingent emergence bring to full blossom a seed of regression already contained in the mechanism of repression of nature marking the early beginnings of enlightenment rationality. In other words, Adorno suspects that what is wrong with the development of modern bourgeois capitalist society derives from the definitive acceleration it imparts to the tendency of domination over nature to run wild, which implies not only the betrayal of the supposedly original promise of a reconciliation with nature in a

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[107] In a 1968 interview, Foucault admits that he has transformed the surgical techniques of his father and grandfather into a diagnostic mode of writing history: "I am a physician, let's say that I am a diagnostician. I wish to operate a diagnosis and my work consists in bringing to light through the incision of writing that which is the truth of what is dead" (Foucault, *Le Beau Danger*, p. 40, my translation).

rational organisation of society, but also the perverse entrenchment of civilisation's subordination to nature through the latter's delusive projection as utterly other. In this sense, Adorno offers a highly speculative explanation of modernity's pathological quality, which risks to loose the specificity of its historical novelty. Whereas Adorno wraps all modern phenomena in one single account of the same mechanism of renunciation of nature, Foucault argues that "there is no single all-encompassing strategy, valid for all of [modern] society and uniformly bearing on all its manifestations"[108], but rather a network of multiple practices and discourses that have coalesced into the new conditions enabling specific aspects of our modern selves. The genealogical inquiry Foucault undertakes in *The Will to Know*, for instance, explores the heterogeneous threads making up the modern *dispositif* of sexuality in all its problematic singularity, among which he identifies the role played by scientific sciences like psychiatry, pedagogy, and demography, the medicalization of sexuality, the progressive disciplination of criminal justice, and the control exercised through the diffusion of the ancient religious techniques of confession to the whole social body. It is only by playing the diversity of the historical archive against the chimeras of universality and necessity that, for Foucault, genealogy can exercise its critical function as effective history, thereby showing "the lowly realities beneath the great ideals, the stubborn chance beneath the grand teleological narratives, and the bodies beneath the life of concepts".[109] Such a procedure might be further illustrated by the following passage, which is included in Foucault's discussion of the techniques of disciplinary power presented in *Discipline and Punish*:

Small techniques of notation, of registration, of constituting files, of arranging facts in

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[108] Foucault, *History of Sexuality 1*, p. 103, translation amended.
[109] Sforzini, *Michel Foucault. Une pensée du corps*, p. 35, my translation.

columns and tables that are so familiar to us now, were of decisive importance in the epistemological 'thaw' of the sciences of the individual. One is no doubt right to pose the Aristotelean problem: is a science of the individual possible and legitimate? A great problem needs great solutions perhaps. But there is the small historical problem of the emergence, towards the end of the eighteenth century, […] of the entry of the individual […] into the general functioning of scientific discourse. To this simple question of fact, one must no doubt give an answer lacking in "nobility"; one should look into these procedures of writing and registration, one should look into the mechanisms of examination, into the formation of the mechanisms of discipline, and of a new type of power over bodies. Is this the birth of the sciences of man? It is probably to be found in these "ignoble" archives, where the modern play of coercion over bodies, gestures and behaviour has its beginnings.[110]

This passage provides us with a clear snapshot of what I shall describe below as the diagnostic axis of Foucault's critical project. Far from studying meanings, ideas, or representations, Foucault's archaeo-genealogical method finds its point of departure in the examination of a complex set of discursive and non-discursive practices, which are seen as responsible for the contingent emergence of specific historical problematizations. As Foucault himself clarifies, the latter notion indicates at one and the same time the proper object of his inquiries and the act he performs by writing his histories. This two-dimensionality has induced some commentators to maintain that there is a "fundamental ambivalence"[111] in his methodology. I shall head off such a misinterpretation by elucidating the two dimensions of Foucault's problematizations in turn.

(1) Problematizations as objects of inquiry. In a series of lectures delivered at Berkeley in 1983, Foucault claims that he is

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[110] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 190–91.
[111] Han, *Foucault's Critical Project*, p. 185.

trying to analyse the way institutions, practices, habits, and behaviour become a problem […]. The history of thought is the analysis of the way an unproblematic field of experience, or a set of practices, which were accepted without question, which were familiar and "silent", out of discussion, becomes a problem, raises discussion and debate, incites new reactions, and induces a crisis in the previously silent behaviour, habits, practices, and institutions.[112]

Foucault explains the historical processes leading up to our present by targeting "the conditions in which human beings 'problematize' what they are, what they do, and the world in which they live".[113] The analysis of these problematizations enables Foucault not only to explain the displacement of previous practices due to their inadequacy to tackle certain issues, but also to illustrate how past problematizations constitute the basis for the elaboration of the institutions, functions, and objects of our own practices, which describe as many responses to these very same problematics:

The development of a given into a question, the transformation of a group of obstacles and difficulties into problems to which the diverse solutions will attempt to produce a response, is […] the point of problematization and the proper work of thought.[114]

Accordingly, problematizations do not represent the "creation by discourse of an object that does not exist"[115], but rather they indicate at one and the same time the conditions of possibility of a definite historical configuration, the intricate ensemble of discursive and non-discursive practices at the root of its appearance (what Foucault calls "the apparatus"), and "the manner in which human beings […] find themselves

[112] Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, p. 74.
[113] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 10.
[114] Foucault, "Polemics, Politics, Problematizations", p. 389, translation amended.
[115] Foucault, "The Concern for Truth", p. 257.

engaged […] with both process and products (technologies of power, knowledge and the self)".[116] (2) Problematization as an act of inquiry. While he is concerned with the diagnosis of "the problematizations through which being offers itself to be, necessarily thought"[117], Foucault further qualifies his critical interrogations as an "enterprise of 'problematization', an effort to render problematic and doubtful the evidences, practices, rules, institutions and habits that have been sedimented for decades and decades"[118] as their manifested responses:

> The role of an intellectual […] is to question […] what is postulated as self-evident, to disturb people's mental habits, [...] to dissipate what is familiar and accepted, to re-examine rules and institutions and on the basis of this *reproblematization* [...] to participate in the formation of a political will.[119]

As a critical activity, problematization unmasks the problems at the basis of particular practices, while at the same time questioning the way in which such problematics persistently constrain our modes of representation and self-constitution. In other terms, through his archaeo-genealogical examinations, Foucault seeks not only to clarify the historical problematizations behind our ossified practices, but also to challenge them by contesting the inevitability and naturalness of these practices, thereby opening up past problematizations to alternative responses.

The success of Foucault's enterprise as a history of the present depends upon his ability to navigate the tension between these two sides of the diagnostic axis of his critical project – between the conception of problematizations as objects of inquiry and the idea of problematization as an act of investigation –, clarifying the historical

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[116] Deacon, "Theory as Practice: Foucault's Concept of Problematization", p. 139.
[117] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 10.
[118] Foucault, "Interview with *Actes*", p. 394, translation amended.
[119] Foucault, "The Concern for Truth", p. 265, emphasis added.

processes by which certain problematizations have contingently emerged as the horizon of our modes of thought and action in the present. For example, Foucault's work of the late 1970s provides us with an explanation of how the properly modern problematization of biopolitics results from the conjunctural alliance of a multiple array of knowledges (statistics, demography, political economy, clinical medicine), practices (social control, hygiene, normalization, vaccination, the regulation of urban milieu, economic *laissez-faire*), and techniques (pastoral care, police, *dispositifs* of security, governmental administration, wage manufacturing). Albeit endowed with their specificity, Foucault observes that all of these determining factors coalesce around the question of the management of population as a living entity, which thereby becomes the problematic source not only of the displacement of the unproductive, pre-biopolitical modes of sovereign and disciplinary power but also, and more importantly, of the generalisation of the new art of government marking our epoch, i.e. liberalism.

This philosophical endeavour has a remarkably Kantian inflection. Nevertheless, it is not Kant's "analytic of truth" as it is presented in his first Critique that Foucault is interested in. Rather, as I anticipated in the introduction, Foucault draws inspiration from Kant's political and historical reflections on the *Aufklärung* as a critical ethos aimed at "the problematization of an actuality and the philosopher's questioning of this actuality to which he belongs and in relation to which he has to position himself"[120], in short at a critical ontology of our actuality. In this respect, Foucault does not take up Kant's quest for the universal and necessary structures of any possible experience, but rather seeks to discern the conditions of "distinctive objects whose possibility for our ways of thinking and doing is constitutive of our historical

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[120] Foucault, "What is Revolution?", 85.

present".[121] *Pace* Koopman, however, this does not mean that Foucault is the kind of empiricist philosopher who would renounce any talk of the transcendental.[122] To the contrary, being fully conscious that discarding the Kantian empirical-transcendental doublet marking our modern episteme would be tantamount to forsaking intelligibility altogether[123], Foucault proceeds to a radical historicization of the transcendental, which shows that the problematizations defining the conditions of possibility of the present are historically composed out of contingent assemblages of cultural and social practices shaping our modern historical a priori.[124] Indeed, as Veyne puts it,

> all these practices have in common the fact that they are both empirical and transcendental: empirical and thus always surpassable, transcendental and thus constitutive as long as they are not effaced (and only the devil knows with what force these "discourses" […] impose themselves, since they are the conditions of possibility of all action). Foucault did not object to being made to say that the transcendental was historical.[125]

To state it otherwise, Foucault's archaeo-genealogical analyses of our experience of madness, punishment, and sexuality (among others) investigate how the limits defined by our historical practices have been universalized to form the seemingly unsurpassable boundaries of our regime of rationality and form of subjectivity, whose constraining force is not of the order of the necessary but rather has the same

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[121] Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique*, p. 112, text amended.
[122] Ibid., especially p. 110.
[123] Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 347.
[124] Although she fails to recognize the relevance of Foucault's notion of problematization, for a somewhat similar position see Allen, *The Politics of Our Selves*, chapter 2.
[125] Veyne, "The Final Foucault and His Ethics", p. 228.

contingent nature as the practices they condition.[126] That is the reason why, explicitly aligning his work to the Enlightenment as a modern attitude based on "the permanent critique of our historical era"[127], Foucault writes that

> criticism is no longer going to be practiced in the search for formal structures with universal value but, rather, as a historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying. In that sense, this criticism is not transcendental, and its goal is not that of making a metaphysics possible: it is genealogical in its design and archaeological in its method. Archaeological – and not transcendental – in the sense that it will not seek to identify the universal structures of all knowledge [*connaissance*] or of all possible moral action, but will seek to treat the instances of discourse that articulate what we think, say, and do as so many historical events. And […] genealogical in the sense that it will not deduce from the form of what we are what it is impossible for us to do and to know; but it will separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think.[128]

The target of Foucault's archaeo-genealogical inquiries, therefore, is what Owen has called our "aspectival captivity"[129] to the perspective associated with the modern regime of power-knowledge, which defines the self-reproducing, unchallenged horizon of intelligibility of our practices. In this sense, comparative examinations of their works fail to notice that Adorno and Foucault have two different objects of critique: whereas Adorno seeks to emancipate us from our condition of "ideological captivity" by bringing to awareness the material and psychological conditions

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[126] Parenthetically, this idea of a conditioning element that is of the same nature of the conditioned *explanandum* undermines Han's reading of Foucault as engaged in the Kantian project of drawing a neat line of demarcation between the transcendental and the empirical (See Han, *Foucault's Critical Project*).

[127] Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?", p. 312.

[128] Ibid., pp. 315–16.

[129] Owen, "Criticism and Captivity", especially pp. 216–19.

shaping the hidden course of history beneath the delusionary and self-legitimizing narrative of the capitalist social totality, Foucault seeks to call into question the regime of truth that draws the contours of the field of our experience through the creation of an effect of displacement in our perception of social phenomena. Interestingly, however, the *historie fiction* Foucault elaborates to obtain this effect bears strong resemblance to Adorno's constellative use of the historical material. Following its Latin etymology, in fact, by the notion of "fiction" Foucault means "a partial and exaggerated"[130] practice of history motivated by the urgency of provoking a transformation of the present through a perspectival selection of series of past elements capable of making visible not only the power relations with which we are bound up but also potential lines of fragility in the prevailing systems of power-knowledge:

> What I want to do […] is to solve this problem: to work out an interpretation, a reading
> of a certain reality, which might be such that, on one hand, this interpretation could
> produce some effects of truth; and on the other hand, these effects of truth could become
> implements within possible struggles.[131]

When Foucault wrote *Madness and Civilisation*, for instance, antipsychiatry did not even exist in Europe. Nevertheless, the book was received as an attack against psychiatry. "Why?", Foucault asks. "Because for me – and for those who read it and used it – the book constituted a transformation in the historical, theoretical, and moral or ethical relationship we have with madness, the mentally ill, the psychiatric

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[130] Foucault, "Foucault étudie la raison d'État", p. 859, my translation. On the hyperbolic and exaggerated style of Foucault's genealogies, see Saar, "Genealogy and Subjectivity", pp. 238–40.
[131] Foucault, "Clarifications on the Question of Power", p. 261, translation amended. See also Foucault, "Structuralism and Post-structuralism", p. 450.

institution, and the very truth of psychiatric discourse".[132] To put it more generally, since as Foucault argues truth is always already enmeshed in power relations, the point of critique is to replace the historian's reconstruction of the past as an objective sequence of events with the creation of a fictionalized, ideal-typical truth, which not only bears traction on the experience we have of ourselves but also trigger a change in the future:

> The people who read me […] often tell me with a laugh, "You know very well that what you say is really just fiction". I always reply, "Of course, there's no question of it being anything else but fiction". […] my problem is not to satisfy professional historians; my problem is to construct myself, and to invite others to share an experience of what we are, not only our past but also our present, an experience of our modernity in such a way that we might come out of it transformed.[133]

To state it otherwise, as O'Leary puts it, "fiction (in the broadest sense possible) relates to reality by opening up virtual spaces which allow us to engage in a potentially transformative relation with the world: to bring about that which does not exist and to transform that which does exist".[134] Through the exploration of unseen, latent possibilities in the present reality, then, fictions serve two tightly interrelated functions: on the one hand, grounded in a radical ethics of problematization, they fabricate a transfigurative historical narrative that disrupts the dominant games of power-knowledge by disclosing the arbitrariness and contingency of the social practices the present has forced upon us as "universal, necessary, [and] obligatory"[135]

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[132] Foucault, "Interview with Michel Foucault", p. 243.
[133] Ibid., p. 242.
[134] O'Leary, *Foucault and Fiction*, p. 87.
[135] Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?", p. 315.

constraints. On the other, "freeing thought from what it silently thinks"[136], fictions also represent invitations for both the writer and the reader to experiment with the possibility to think and act differently, thereby eliciting a proleptic modification of the way we see and constitute ourselves with respect to the power-laden reality we inhabit.[137] "I hope the truth of my books is in the future"[138], claims Foucault. In this sense, we are finally in a good position to appreciate what I shall call the *anticipatory-reconstructive* side of Foucault's critical project.[139] As a philosophical attitude, "the critique of what we are" is not only "the historical analysis of the limits that have been imposed on us" (the diagnostic moment I unpacked above), but also "an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them [*de leur franchissement possible*]"[140]. For Foucault, therefore, critique is a "historical-practical test of the limits we may go beyond", which takes the form of a political and ethical process of self-transformation, i.e. of an immanent "work carried out by ourselves upon ourselves"[141] in the attempt to foster alerted and circumscribed changes that might enable us to "pull ourselves free of our modern age".[142]

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[136] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 9.

[137] Discussing *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault argues: "Readers perceived it as a description of contemporary society as a society of confinement. I never wrote that, though it's true that its writing was connected with a certain experience of our modernity. The book makes use of true documents, but in such a way that through them it is possible not only to arrive at an establishment of truth but also to experience something that permits a change, a transformation of the relationship we have with ourselves and with the world where, up to then, we had seen ourselves as being without problems – in short, a transformation of the relationship we have with our knowledge. So this game of truth and fiction – or if your prefer, of verification and fabrication – will bring to light something which connects us, sometimes in a completely unconscious way, with our modernity, while at the same time causing it to appear as changed. The experience through which we grasp the intelligibility of certain mechanisms (for example, imprisonment, punishment, and so on) and the way in which we are enabled to detach ourselves from them by perceiving them differently will be, at best, one and the same thing. That is really the heart of what I do" (Foucault, "Interview with Michel Foucault", p. 244).

[138] Foucault, "Foucault étudie la raison d'État", p. 860, my translation.

[139] I shall return on this second axis of Foucault critical project in Chapter 5, where I shall extensively analyse his ethics of experimentation.

[140] Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?", p. 319.

[141] Ibid., p. 316.

[142] Foucault, "On the Ways of Writing History", p. 293, translation amended. As an example, Foucault refers to "the very specific transformations that have proved to be possible in the last twenty years in a certain number of areas which concern our ways of being and thinking, relations to authority, relations between the sexes, the way in which we perceive insanity or illness" (Foucault, "What is

3. Conclusion

In the guise of a conclusion, allow me to clarify the originality of Adorno's and Foucault's critical approaches by way of a comparison of their major convergences and deviations.

(1) Both their philosophical enterprises can be described as a historical critique of Kant's critical project. Like Adorno's negative dialectics, in fact, Foucault's archaeo-genealogical method is not an account of the universal and necessary structures of experience, but rather a "historically situated tool"[143] for problematizing our actuality in the attempt to bring to light the transcendental and empirical conditions at the contingent origin of the entwinement of the rationality of existing practices with dangerous forms of domination marking our modern historical *a priori*.[144] In brief, their inquiries start from the same set of questions:

> *What* is this Reason that we use? What are its historical effects? What are its limits, and
> what are its dangers? How can we exist as rational beings, fortunately committed to
> practicing a rationality that is unfortunately crisscrossed by intrinsic dangers?[145]

(2) For both Adorno and Foucault, replying to these questions does not amount to submitting our rational practices to the judgment of a supposedly uncontaminated stratum of reason[146], as Habermas for instance proposes when he evaluates present discursive practices as to their conformity to the context-transcendent, regulative

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Enlightenment?", p. 316).

[143] Allen, *The End of Progress*, p. 224.

[144] In this respect, as far as Adorno is concerned, I think O'Connor is misguided when he contends that the task of Adorno's negative dialectics is to provide a transcendental (in the Kantian sense of the world) explanation of the positive structures of non-reified experience – a task that furthermore appears to be incompatible with Adorno's (epistemic) negativism (see O'Connor, *Adorno's Negative Dialectic*). Indeed, as Adorno puts it, "dialectical reason's own essence has come to be and will pass, like antagonistic society" (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 141).

[145] Foucault, "Space, Knowledge, and Power", p. 359.

[146] See Adorno, *History and Freedom*, p. 157. See also Allen, *The End of Progress*, p. 250.

ideal of a consensual communication community grounded upon the universal constraints of the conventional and post-conventional rules for rational argumentation.[147] As Foucault claims, "nothing would be more sterile"[148] than falling prey to what he elsewhere calls "the blackmail of 'being either for or against the Enlightenment".[149] Instead, although Foucault is quite sceptical that "dialectical nuances" might help us break free from this blackmail[150], their shared concern is to tailor a form of critical thinking that takes the shape of a genealogical investigation of the present aimed at releasing "the explosive force contained in the revelation of processes of power and forceful construction".[151] "By showing on what kinds of assumptions, what kind of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought the practices we accept rest"[152], Adorno and Foucault disclose how the present has been contingently assembled out of a problematic, riddle-like series of historical processes, thereby providing us "with some of the tools we would need for beginning the labour of remaking our future differently".[153] Again, what differs is the narrative they tell us. While through his micrological constellations Adorno seeks to deliver an insight into the material and psychological dynamics that function as the buried motor of our natural history behind the cloak of the dominant ideology, Foucault describes the way people do what they do and the manner it is discursively justified by focusing on the veiled conditions of possibility of our own specific practices, without however regarding these conditions as standing on a different level of reality from the practices they enable.[154]

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[147] See Habermas, *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics*, p. 51.
[148] Foucault, "The Subject and Power", p. 328.
[149] Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?", p. 314, translation amended.
[150] Ibid., p. 313.
[151] Saar, "Genealogy and Subjectivity", p. 239, text amended.
[152] Foucault, "So Is It Important to Think?", p. 456.
[153] Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique*, p. 130.
[154] Veyne has aptly rephrased the point by way of a metaphor. Let's think of history as an iceberg. Foucault invites us to look at the part of it beneath the surface of the water, which cannot be

(3) Premised upon the capacity of the subject "not to feel at home with itself"[155] – i.e. to step back and reflect on the putative practices and the social norms that underpin them –, the goal of Adorno's and Foucault's critical histories is to provoke "textual shocks"[156], opening up alternative ways of thinking and acting at the frontiers of the intelligible space defined by the modern historical a priori. Their success depends not so much upon their ability to redeem the validity of their claims through the universal and lawful procedures of argumentation of a communicative action oriented "to a rationally motivated agreement" (with all the strong idealizing presuppositions that this operation would entail).[157] Rather, their effectiveness results from their power to bring about a change in one's affective and bodily dimension, in one's way of seeing experience, in the relation one has with oneself and with the world, a change that encourages to question "the contemporary limits of the necessary"[158] in a context-transgressing move towards an open-ended and ameliorative future. In this respect, Foucault's description of his books seems to equally fit Adorno's works: they are "experience books", which leave us radically transformed.[159]

(4) Finally, Adorno's and Foucault's critical methods should be understood as self-critical endeavours capable of reflexively accounting for their own historical presuppositions, being "always in a position of beginning again". Renouncing the "hope of ever acceding to a point of view that could give us access to any complete and definitive knowledge [*connaissance*] of what may constitute our historical

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considered as a concealed motor of a different nature but simply the segment of ice that does not reach the threshold of visibility (Veyne, "Foucault Revolutionizes History", especially p. 156).

[155] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 39, translation amended.

[156] Saar, "Genealogy and Subjectivity", p. 239.

[157] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 1*, p. 137.

[158] Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?", p. 313.

[159] Foucault, "Interview with Michel Foucault", p. 246. Given her attempt to mobilize Adorno's and Foucault's critical histories of the present as an alternative to Habermas' philosophical project (as well as Honneth's and Forst's for that matter), it is surprising that in *The End of Progress* Allen entirely overlooks this point of convergence.

limits"[160], then, their immanent critique of modernity's ambiguities and inertias is marked by a deep sense of modesty, according to which fallibilistic self-reflection is not only an epistemic stance but also the essential prerequisite to engage in a life of resistance.[161]

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[160] Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?", p. 316–17.

[161] For Adorno's reflections on the principle of modesty see Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, pp. 168–70. On the convergence between Adorno and Foucault with regard to fallibilism see Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, especially p. 111.

Chapter 4
Normativity

The previous chapter has bracketed the question as to whether Adorno and Foucault are able to provide a compelling normative justification of their critical claims. Here, I shall address this issue by, first, reviewing Adorno's and Foucault's normative strategies respectively (Section 1 and 2) and then, second, by illustrating their common attempt to promote a fuller realisation of the emancipatory promises contained in the Enlightenment project (Section 3).

1. Adorno's Negativism

As I showed above, Adorno's critique of late modernity does make normative claims. Contrary to what Tassone maintains[1], in fact, Adorno's theory is not a merely descriptive explanation of the antagonistic structure of advanced capitalist reality, but also a prescriptive endeavour directed at showing that our social world ought not be as it stands. Nevertheless, can Adorno justify the normative claims he levels against the injustice of the current state of affairs? After reviewing the positive strategies that most of his advocates have put forward to solve the normativity problem posed by his social theory, here I shall analyse in more detail recent alternative readings of Adorno's normative project, according to which his critical method is grounded in a bodily perception of the normative force of the bad without appeal to any standard for goodness. Whereas I think these readings substantially grasp the main tenets of Adorno's account of normativity, I shall show that they provide us only with a partial

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[1] Tassone, "Amoral Adorno".

solution to the normativity problem, and that much more work needs to be done if one wishes to defend Adorno's pessimistic view of our modern social world.

But allow me to start by addressing what I have called the positive glosses of Adorno's theory. Apart from those who claim that he endorses transcendent critique[2], most of his defenders argue that Adorno cannot remain committed to immanent criticism while at the same time indicting modern society for being utterly deprived of any trace of rationality. On their view, what needs to be shown is that Adorno does operate with some conception of the good, or, more precisely, that he is able to identify potentially emancipatory standpoints within our historical context capable of intimating a radically different social order. Such a defensive strategy represents a counter-argument against the allegations of those unsympathetic readers (like Habermas, Benhabib, and Rosen) who think that Adorno adopts an irremediably aporetic position, which – being incapable of giving "reasons for the right of criticism"[3] – can only divert into a romantic invocation of art or into philosophical "gesticulation".[4] In order to make their argument stick, however, Adorno's advocates reject his claim that today's society constitutes a systematically wrong context of delusion. This claim, so their argument goes, is not to be taken literally but rather as a rhetorical exaggeration, which blurs the presence of elements of intramundane transcendence within Adorno's own picture of our totally integrated society. Cook's proposal in this sense has already been discussed in the previous chapter, but other influential interpretations opt for a similar hermeneutic move. O'Connor, for instance, contends that Adorno's negative dialectics defines the positive notion of a non-reified experience based on subject-object mediation, which is employed to assess the

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[2] See Buchwalter, "Hegel, Adorno, and The Concept of Transcendent Critique".
[3] Habermas, *Philosophical-Political Profiles*, p. 106. See also Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*, especially chapters 5 and 6 and Rosen, *Hegel's Dialectic and its Criticism*, pp. 153–80.
[4] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action. Vol. I*, p. 385.

defective and pathological nature of present theories and practices. [5] Schweppenhäuser holds that what enables Adorno to account for the normativity of his view is his implicit appeal to the idea of social justice inherent in modernity's moral universalism, an appeal that Adorno leaves largely unarticulated to the advantage of a penetrating analysis of the ambivalences of our social norms.[6] From the same perspective, Theunissen argues that Adorno's philosophy hangs upon a series of pre-negativistic or even anti-negativistic assumptions.[7] More specifically, Adorno's negativism would conceal a strong, epistemic positivism, which derives from the fact that "Adorno turns his rejection of Hegel's thesis about the positive result of the double negation, *not* against the thesis itself, but against its ontologization".[8] To put it more explicitly, for Theunissen, Adorno refutes the idea that the negation of damaged life automatically amounts to the realization of the good, but retains the validity of the thesis insofar as it is read as a claim about the accessibility of the good to philosophical knowledge. Unless we have some knowledge of the good, in fact, we are left with no contrastive foil against which we could understand and therefore denounce the negativity of the wrong state of things. Now, my contention is that these positivist attempts to solve the normativity problem of Adorno's philosophy risk divesting it of the original orientation distinguishing its theoretical stance, namely of its deep negativism. As Freyenhagen has aptly put it, Adorno maintains not only that our culture and its social institutions are gravely wrong (substantive negativism), but also that the intrinsic badness of our historical predicament forecloses any possible knowledge of or acquaintance with the good

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[5] O'Connor, *Adorno's Negative Dialectic.*
[6] Schweppenhäuser, "Adorno's Negative Moral Philosophy".
[7] See also Seel, *Adornos Philosophie der Kontemplation.*
[8] Theunissen, "Negativität bei Adorno", p. 51, my translation.

(epistemic negativism).[9] The subordination of every piece of reality to the social totality tendentially plugs even "the last holes left open by the commodity world"[10], while the dominant ideology is so all-encompassing that it has "a share also in what [humans] envisage to tear the veil with"[11], thereby tainting our capacity of conceptualising or imagining what a good or right society should look like:

> Whoever paints an image of the right condition […] cannot disregard society's supremacy [*Vormacht*] over himself. Even if he could imagine all things as radically altered, his imagination would remain chained to him and his present time as static points of reference, and everything would be askew.[12]

Capitalist integration undermines any "attempt to theoretically construct and positively assert transcendence".[13] Even the few remnants of non-fungible experience become utterly unreliable, since exchange society corrodes the subjective prerequisites necessary to ascertain the "authenticity" of these experiences. As a result, for Adorno, it is misguided to think that these experiences would enable one to gain an insight into what the good life would look like. Whoever believes that they attest to the presence of transcendence, like the proponents of a positivist interpretation of his philosophy, falls prey to a dangerous illusion. Art itself, which is often considered as Adorno's proposed means for elaborating a conception or an image of the redemptive state of affairs[14], is affected by "[…] the taboo that prohibits

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[9] See Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy*, pp. 1–25.
[10] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 370, translation amended.
[11] Ibid., p. 372, Redmond's translation used.
[12] Ibid., p. 352, translation amended. Adorno employs the notion of "good" and "right" interchangeably to indicate a positive condition beyond the *status quo*, though the textual evidence shows that reference to the former is more frequent.
[13] Benzer, *The Sociology of Theodor Adorno*, p. 214.
[14] Among others, see for instance Brunkhorst, *Adorno and Critical Theory*; Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume I*; Sherratt, *Adorno's Positive Dialectic*; Wellmer, *Truth, Semblance, and Reconciliation*; Zuidervaart, *Social Philosophy after Adorno*.

any cognition of the positive utopia".[15] If one wishes to insist attributing a positive

role to these experiences, the latter should be traced in their capacity to hinder the

definitive closure of the context of immanence upon itself. For Adorno, what these

experiences convey is the promise of "something transcending life"[16], the sense that

the given reality could be changed.[17] In other terms, experiences like those of art,

metaphysics, and theology enable us to grasp the possibility inscribed in reality for a

radically different world, whose lineaments can only be outlined by way of the

negation of the mechanisms of reification shaping the current predicament. Contrary

to Lyotard's reading of it as a regressive reformulation of the Hegelian quest for

totality[18], this means that the function of Adorno's notion of redemption as a

placeholder for the good should be understood as an "experiential reminder"[19] of the

negativity of our unreconciled condition. *Pace* Theunissen, in fact, Adorno denies

that the critical negation of the damaged life's negativity brings forth anything

positive. "The negation of the negation only yields more negativity", because it

shows that "what exists is not yet what it ought to be".[20] Under the present

circumstances one can hope to attain nothing more, Adorno claims, since any attempt

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[15] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 247. Zuidervaart is therefore mistaken when he maintains that: "modern art can model how labour could be transformed, from a condition of alienation from nature and of economic exploitation to one of disalienation and social solidarity" (Zuidervaart, *Social Philosophy after Adorno*, p. 36). Art is compromised as every other activity. It can point to an ameliorated state of affairs only indirectly, via determinate negation, and not by providing fully-fledge positive models (see Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, pp. 35–6 and 88–9).

[16] Adorno, *Metaphysics*, p. 145. See also Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy*, p. 227.

[17] As he states in his *Aesthetic Theory*, for instance, art expresses "the wish to bring about a better world" (Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 9): art gives voice to the suffering caused by reality's negativity and, at the same time, intimates the utopia of a reconciled condition, whereby in the given reality there exists an ineradicable yearning for something other.

[18] See Lyotard, "Adorno as Devil".

[19] Hammer, *Adorno and the Political*, pp. 105–06.

[20] Cook, *Adorno on Nature*, p. 80. For Adorno's rejection of Hegel's positive negation see Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 158–61. Adorno's position is well summarized in the following passage by Finlayson: "Moreover, this knowledge that the world is radically evil is not contrastive: it does not presuppose knowledge of what a correct or good world would be, in much the same way that our immediate knowledge that pain or suffering is bad presupposes no antecedent knowledge of what is pleasurable" (Finlayson, *Adorno on the Ethical and the Ineffable*, p. 8).

to "nail down transcendence"[21] is bound to misfire, cementing the existing social order.[22] The critical thinker, then, must eschew any form of authoritative self-righteousness derived from the presumption to occupy an unassailable standpoint, while opting for determinate negation as the only means available to orient himself amidst the badness of the present:

> For thought there is really no other possibility […] than to do what the miner's adage forbids: to work one's way through the darkness without a lamp, without possessing the positive through the higher conception of the negation of the negation, and to immerse oneself in the darkness as deeply as one possibly can.[23]

That is the reason why, at the end of *Minima Moralia*, Adorno characteristically describes the task of critique as marked by a fundamental contradiction. The aim of critical thought is to provoke through "felt contact with its objects" what Adorno calls a "*Verfremdungseffekt*", namely an effect of displacement and estrangement which reveals the wrongness of social reality, while pointing to its cracks and fissures. On the one hand, such an alternative view "is the simplest of things", since "consummate negativity, once squarely faced, delineates the mirror image of its opposite". On the other, however, "it is also an utterly impossible thing", since it is premised upon the capacity to gain "a standpoint removed, even though by a hair's breadth, from the scope of existence, whereas we well know that any possible knowledge […] is […] marked […] by the same distortion and indigence which it seeks to escape".[24] To state it briefly, what the defenders of a positive interpretation of Adorno's theory fail to appreciate is the scope of Adorno's negativism: today, the badness of our modern

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[21] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 400.
[22] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 247.
[23] Adorno, *Metaphysics*, p. 144.
[24] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 247, translation amended.

social world buries any knowledge of the good or of other utopian ideals (the right, humanity, the reconciled condition, etc.), whereby the scant positive experiences we might still have should be read not as justifications of his normative claims but rather as the last vacillating attestations of the possibility of change.

Following this line of argument, Adorno maintains that one does not have to get access to the good to recognise the wrongness afflicting the world we inhabit. There is an indefinite but undeniable existential intuition that things could be otherwise and that supplies "enough of contrast to recognise the bad for what it is".[25] At the end of "Individuum und Organisation", Adorno makes the point thusly:

> We may not know what man [*der Mensch*] and the right organisation of human affairs [*der menschlichen Dinge*] should be, but what man must not be and what organisation of human affairs is false we do indeed know, and only in this particular and concrete knowledge is the Other and the Positive open to us.[26]

Yet, if knowledge of the good is definitively foreclosed, what reasons can Adorno advance to warrant the normative force of his claims? Despite its apparent intractability – which might lead one to think with Habermas that he falls foul of "a performative contradiction" –, I think a partially successful answer to this question can be found in the immanent normative standard delivered by Adorno's method of natural history. In the previous chapter we have seen that through the method of natural history Adorno intends to instil in the reader an affective experience of the wrongness of the present as it is expressed in instances of bodily suffering, which by themselves call for their own eradication. As a result, without any recourse to elements of intramundane transcendence hinting at what the good and right society

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[25] Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy*, p. 227.
[26] Adorno, "Individuum und Organisation", p. 456, my translation.

should look like, Adorno seems to identify the normative and justificatory source of his critique in the immediate, somatic reactions of abhorrence we experience in the face of suffering and pain, whose badness provides us with sufficient reasons (albeit sometimes revocable ones) to change the *status quo*:

> All pain and all negativity, the moving forces of dialectical thinking, assume the variously conveyed, sometimes unrecognizable form of physical things […]. The physical moment tells our knowledge that suffering ought not to be, that things should be different "Woe speaks: 'Go.'" The specifically materialistic element thus converges with the critical, with praxis aimed at social change.[27]

To put it differently, for Adorno, whenever pain is experienced, our somatic impulses give us reasons to convict society for producing suffering and to act in such a way as to oppose that suffering, without rational deliberation intervening into the process. Indeed, Adorno argues that if one opts for theoretical reflection, not only would the initial practical impetus be inhibited, but one would also get embroiled in an irresolvable knot of discursive arguments and counter-arguments, which would finally lead one to brush aside the moral strength of the impulses:

> Moral questions are succinctly posed […] in lines such as: No man should be tortured; there should be no concentration camps – while all of this continues in Asia and Africa and is repressed merely because, as ever, the humanity of civilization is inhumane toward the people it shamelessly brands as uncivilized. The lines are true as an impulse, as a reaction to the news that torture is going on somewhere. They must not be rationalized; as an abstract principle they would fall promptly into the bad infinities of derivation and validity.[28]

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[27] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, pp. 202–03, translation amended.
[28] Ibid., p. 285.

As a consequence, Habermas' charge that Adorno cannot discursively ground his critical claims seems to postulate a misplaced conception of what an account of normativity should amount to. Against the background of these remarks, in fact, a justificatory account of normativity for Adorno would be superfluous and outrageous, since it would look for the source of normativity not in the particular situation we encounter but rather in some abstract postulate (be it Kant's categorical imperative or Habermas' own ideal principles of communicative reason), thereby neglecting that our contextual, impulsive responses to the intrinsic and objective badness of the present condition already supply sufficient guidance:

> The normative problems arise from historical constellations, and they themselves demand, as it were, mutely and 'objectively', that they be changed. […] For instance, as long as the forces of production are not sufficient to satisfy the primitive needs of all, one cannot declare, in abstract terms, as a value that all human beings must have something to eat. But if there is still starvation in a society in which hunger could be avoided here and now in view of the available and potential wealth of goods, then this demands the abolition of hunger through a change in the relations of production. This demand arises from the situation, from its analysis in all its dimensions, independently of the generality and necessity of a notion of value. The values onto which this demand, arising from the situation, is projected are the poor and largely distorted copy of this demand.[29]

Premised upon the epistemic and ethical primacy of our somatic engagement with the world over the delusionary structures of our conceptual apparatus, therefore, Adorno's key insight consists in recognizing that the current social order might be so intolerably bad to trigger in our body a mimetic impulse of solidarity with those who

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[29] Adorno *et al.*, *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, p. 62. On this point see also Bernstein's discussion of "material inferences" in *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics*, especially pp. 264–65.

are suffering from its irrational mechanisms, an impulse that communicates to the cognitive domain the necessary normative reasons motivating their urgent abolition.[30] Yet, one might rebut that *ceteris paribus* the abolition of something bad is good. Adorno himself would have hardly disagreed with this claim, but nonetheless would have insisted that the abolition of significant bads gives us at best a negative characterization of the good, leaving positive images of utopia necessarily "indeterminate and vague".[31] For Adorno, this means that no full knowledge of the good is attainable within our context of delusion. "We cannot represent the good", as Horkheimer asserts, but nevertheless we can "indicate what we suffer under, what demands transformation".[32] That is the reason why Adorno clearly rejects any demand for constructiveness in criticism. Meeting this demand would be tantamount to sacrificing the disruptive power of critique at the altar of the *status quo*, thus forsaking the last immunizing defence we can wield against the domination of the capitalist totality.[33] To summarize: Adorno's philosophy can be better understood as a form of "metaethical negativism"[34], whereby the vindication of his normative and ethical claims depends upon its capacity to recognize and explain the persistent deficiencies of contemporary social life without any appeal to positive and constructive standards.

Now, metaethical negativism can make sense only if one has at least a minimal picture of the conditions society needs to satisfy in order for human beings to enjoy a

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[30] As Hulatt reformulates the point, "somatic content acquires a deliberative 'dignity'", since it ends up informing the deliberative processes of the mind (Hulatt, "Sub-Abstract Bodies", p. 471). See also Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 193.

[31] Jaeggi, "*Minima Moralia* as Critique of Forms of Life", p. 75.

[32] Horkheimer, *Vorträge und Aufzeichnungen 1949–73*, p. 289, my translation. It seems thus false to maintain that negativism is "intrinsically conservative" (Badiou, *Ethics*, p. xiii).

[33] Adorno, "Critique", pp. 287–88. Elsewhere, Adorno reformulates the point in the following polemic way: "Today, all dreams of a better life [are] pale, powerless – or kitsch [...] Utopia is strictly, exclusively only in determinate negation. The rest is [...] Ché Guevara" (Adorno in Tiedemann, "Begriff, Bild, Name. Über Adornos Utopie der Erkenntnis", p. 110, note 8, translation in Benzer, "Social Critique in the Totally Socialized Society", p. 581).

[34] Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy*, p. 10.

life that is not utterly damaged and perverted. On Freyenhagen's recent account, this picture comes into view once one recognizes that Adorno's negativism finds its deeper rationale in an Aristotelian conception of normativity, which Adorno probably inherited from his readings of Hegel and Marx. Freyenhagen's thought-provoking argument runs as follows: according to the Aristotelian conception of normativity, goodness and badness are ascribed with respect to a thing's *ergon*, namely with respect to the features a certain thing has to possess in order to operate as a proper exemplar of the genus to which it belongs. Humans share some of these features with animals, like the prospect of survival as well as the need for shelter and nourishment. But in virtue of language and culture humans have other "objective interests", which all concur to meet the basic requirements for the possible realisation of what Adorno call human beings' "potential".[35] Such realisation is sabotaged by the process of reification marking the development of civilisation up to the positivist ideology that underpins today's capitalist totality. Within the current integrated and estranged conditions, therefore, knowledge of the good is barred, since "we have not, *qua* species-beings, come into our own".[36] Nevertheless, that does not prevent us from knowing the bad or the inhuman:

> We may not know what the absolute good is or the absolute norm, we may not even know what man [*der Mensch*] is or the human [*das Menschliche*] or humanity [*Humanität*] – but what the inhuman [*das Unmenschliche*] is we know very well indeed.[37]

What might be sufficient to know the bad, at least in its most deviant forms, is

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[35] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 278.
[36] Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy*, pp. 237–38.
[37] Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, p. 175.

knowledge of our basic functioning *qua* human animals, which does not presuppose any knowledge of right living. The case of bodily suffering is paradigmatic in this sense. For the kind of being we are, we have objective reasons to expunge or mitigate the source of pain. Adorno, however, does not limit himself to identifying the requirements that should be met in order for us to live as "good animals". Rather, as I have just hinted at, his interpretative method enables Adorno to expand the range of those requirements so as to include proper human features beyond sheer survival. According to Freyenhagen, such a method has a double-layered configuration: Adorno starts by disclosing certain phenomena (e.g. neuroses) as expressing the pathological quality of modern life and then clarifies that these experiences can be best explained as shortcomings with respect to basic human functioning. Consequently, the concept of basic human functioning comes to comprise notions like "a minimal level of actively choosing how to structure one's life, of developing a sense of the self with an extended life story, [and] of having meaningful relationships with others".[38] Still, nothing of that commits Adorno to a vision of the fully realized humanity. In this way, as Freyenhagen surmises, Adorno's normativity problem finally finds a solution. Adorno can criticize modern life because he explains the bad as a shortfall from what we know to be basic human functioning, while at the same time maintaining his epistemic negativism by postulating a fuller potential that remains presently unknown. I believe Freyenhagen's picture captures the core tenets of Adorno's account of normativity, defending the legitimacy of his critique of the modern social world. At the same time, however, my claim is that Adorno's philosophy raises a host of problems, which eventually call into question the viability of his own negative approach to late capitalist society. Here I shall discuss just four of

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[38] See Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy*, pp. 241–42.

them.

(1) The first concern I have regards the extent to which the legitimacy of Adorno's normative conception of inhumanity seems to rest upon the justificatory role played by his complex and ambitious account of our modern social world as systematically and radically evil, namely upon the truthfulness of his substantive negativism thesis. The latter's controversial nature derives from its reliance on (a) Adorno's problematic interpretation of Auschwitz and (b) a dubious notion of the good. Let me explain. (a) For Adorno, Auschwitz incarnates the negative culmination of the dialectic of enlightenment, the extreme evil of civilisation's history. As we have seen, since it describes the failure of the whole of modern culture, Adorno holds that Auschwitz has placed all modern agents into what he calls a "guilt context", which prolongs its dark shadow into the present. Adorno also contends that our totally administered society largely replicates the conditions for another Auschwitz to happen[39], whereby today "the individual is as fungible and replaceable as he was under the liquidators' boots".[40] Yet, is this thought justified? Surely, we must be vigilant against any potential form of complacency. Nonetheless, as the passage just quoted reveals, the only support Adorno can offer for his view is a perceived similarity between capitalist integration and the murderous elimination of individuality occurring in Auschwitz, an analogical argument that paradoxically ends up dismissing the non-identity of the sadistic and nihilistic nature of the camps with the hedonistic and narcissistic spirit of late consumerist societies. Hence, Adorno's juxtaposition of the badness of our social world with the evil of Auschwitz lies on a socially and historically questionable ground, retaining scarcely any explanatory power. (b) As far as Adorno's debatable notion of the right life is concerned, the discussion is much more complicated. In

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[39] Adorno, "The Meaning of Working Through the Past", p. 90.
[40] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 362, translation amended.

order to make my case, allow me to resume Adorno's interpretation of world history. Adorno reads world history as the contingent, progressive consolidation of a process of pathological rationalization which finds its last manifestation in the means-ends reversal imposed by capitalism for its own sake, whose irrationality follows from its denial "of the compensation promised by civilisation […] in return for the […] renunciation"[41] of our primordial wish of reconciliation with nature. For Adorno, the realisation of such a promise would mean that human beings could emancipate themselves from the domination exerted by the unleashed pursuit of self-preservation, while expressing all their potential in a healthy state where their unconscious drives for universal happiness and pleasure could finally be satisfied. As the fundamental requirement of an authentically good society, though, compensatory reconciliation seems to impose "a very strong, *contractarian* constraint on social organization".[42] At this stage, a series of issues arises. Firstly, even if one admits that an overall framework for human goodness can exist, one might cast doubts on the reasonableness of Adorno's constraint. Indeed, admitting that we would still be finite human beings in rational society, it seems that the comparison between the pleasure human beings renounced to by repressing their wish of primary mimesis and the pleasure they could enjoy in reconciliation cannot get off the ground, because primary mimesis is predicated upon the loss of the self in nature. Moreover, if they were commensurable, their different quality renders unlikely not only that the pleasure regained could recompense the pleasure we forfeited, but also that one could "determine the level of compensation to which a person is entitled".[43] In this respect, one might suspect that Adorno operates with a inflated sense of what the good would imply, which directly bears upon his substantive negativism. Taking this objection

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[41] Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, p. 138, translation amended.
[42] Jütten, "Adorno on Kant, Freedom and Determinism", p. 569, note 40.
[43] Ibid., p. 558.

into account, Freyenhagen holds that the requirements Adorno introduces are not the expression of a subjective desire for an impossible ideal. Rather, as Adorno's notion of the dialectic of progress hints at, it is the current development of the forces of production that would make materially possible the realisation of human beings' potential in a reconciled social world.[44] Arguably, one can advance the following counter-argument: the "liberation from the primacy of material needs"[45] that the progress of the forces of production could ensure seems to be a necessary but not sufficient condition for compensatory reconciliation to take place. In order for utopian reconfiguration to be intelligible at all, there must also be signposts alluding to the possibility of a material transformation in the organisation of existing social institutions, which in light of the overarching domination of late capitalism seems to be out of sight for the foreseeable future. Furthermore, one can make a second observation: as Rose notes, Adorno focuses his attention exclusively on cultural patterns, intellectual works, and artistic artefacts, without considering other essential social forms like the money-form, the labour-form, and the value-form on which "the analogy of cultural forms itself [finally] depends".[46] What Rose fails to notice is that such a lack affects the plausibility of Adorno's idea that the dialectic of progress heralds the possibility of a reconciled state of affairs: by disregarding the categories just mentioned, in fact, Adorno fails to provide any politico-economic analysis of the crisis-ridden tendencies of modern capitalism, whereby he cannot persuasively explain how the technological development of the forces of production is supposed to make possible the emergence of an alternative society instead of becoming another resource capitalism employs to postpone its collapse *ad kalendas graecas*. Accordingly, pace Freyenhagen, I insist that Adorno's vision of the requirements a

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[44] Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy*, p. 230.
[45] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 207.
[46] Rose, *The Melancholy Science*, pp. 140–41.

right society would need to satisfy in order to count as such remains over-demanding, which leads him to debase even the few positive conquests of European modernity associated with the definitive affirmation of welfare democracies in the late 1960s.[47]

(2) As we have seen, Freyenhagen's defence of Adorno's negative position is based upon the appeal to the Aristotelian notion of basic human functioning. The introduction of this category enables Freyenhagen to accommodate the view that we do not know the good but have reasons to resist capitalist integration, since it hampers us from achieving our human potential. Now, it is not entirely clear whether Adorno's negativism leaves space for such a theoretical move, since it is founded upon the premise that some basic human functioning is still available to empirical observation.[48] But if it does, Freyenhagen simply disentangles Adorno's normative claims from his epistemic negativism without providing much evidence as to the latter's validity, whereby what we are left with is an incomplete and undermotivated defence. Moreover, whereas Adorno's negativist philosophy fares well in cases of extreme evils, one might wonder whether it retains its effectiveness in today's post-Fordist Western societies. Although the most aggressive and overtly exploitative tendencies marking capitalism have not disappeared, it seems that within the context of our neoliberal democracies the features Freyenhagen's Adorno includes under the category of basic human functioning are not negated but rather encouraged by the new "flexible" and "organisation" spirit of capitalism, which erodes internally their emancipatory force through of ambivalent resignification of their normative

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[47] For a synthetic analysis of the moral and political achievements marking the "social-democratic era" in Europe, see Hartmann and Honneth, "Paradoxes of Capitalism", pp. 41–4.
[48] See Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy*, p. 243. While that might be true inasmuch as we consider the possibility to get acquainted with "good animals", the pervasiveness Adorno attributes to the negative social totality seems to make the empirical observation of basic human functioning (conceived as including distinctively human features) at least very unlikely.

content.[49] Contemporary neoliberal economy, for instance, interiorizes the demand for autonomy in light of the critiques moved against the "consumer society" of welfare states, whereby according to the new mechanisms of personal responsibilization individuals are expected to be ready for "authentic" self-realization and to constantly make choices on the basis of their differentiated interests. The conception of basic human functioning underpinning Adorno's philosophy, therefore, appears to be insufficient to explain the misery of our time, standing in need of significant revision and/or expansion.

(3) Another reason of concern is represented by Adorno's picture of suffering and pain as a genuine, authoritative basis for social critique. As I have repeatedly shown, whereas abstract consciousness reflects and cements the subservience of the individual to the capitalist social totality, Adorno identifies in bodily impulses and material needs the last bulwark against complete social determination.[50] In other terms, somatic deliverances describe immunised modes of relating to the social environment, which constitute as many opportunities to acquire the critical consciousness necessary to see the possibility of a modification of social structures that would eliminate existing forms of harm and prevent their reproduction. Now, what Adorno fails to note is that the normativity of our corporeal feeling of revulsion vis-à-vis undergoing or reported suffering is not self-legitimising, but rather is itself often shaped by cultural and social forces. That is particularly true in an "era of the commodification of suffering"[51]: today, not only is a generalized cult of the suffering victim ideologically wielded to justify "humanitarian interventions" geared to ensure

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[49] See also Zambrana, "Paradoxes of Neoliberalism and the Task of Critical Theory".
[50] "For in the needs of even the people who are covered, who are administered, there reacts something in regard to which they are not fully covered – a surplus of their subjective share, which the system has not wholly mastered" (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 92).
[51] McNay, "Suffering and Recognition: Foucault contra Honneth", p. 57.

the perpetuation of systems of power[52], but the discursive normalisation of the experience of suffering by media and popular culture largely compromises the alleged self-legitimation of its normative core. As a result, pace Benzer[53], Adorno's critique of society for generating suffering appears to be marked by the same difficulties of immanent critique[54]: unless Adorno can provide us with criteria for demarcating true somatic deliverances from false ones, critique risks falling prey to false consciousness, condemning society for not living up to the ideological standard of "absence of suffering".[55]

(4) There is a last worry connected to the normative strategy Adorno's opts for, i.e. its surreptitious elitism. A direct corollary of the general corruption of the present, in fact, is that critical experience is the prerogative of only a limited group of individuals, who – by "a stroke of undeserved luck" – are able to grasp the damaged reality.[56] This view may sound elitist and undemocratic, he admits, but the impression would be misguided for mainly two reasons. Firstly, the privilege of experience implies a moral duty. Indeed, blessed by social status or their life story, these individuals have the obligation "to make the moral and, as it were, representative effort to say what most of those for whom they say it […] will not allow themselves to see". Secondly, Adorno warns us against the ideological tendency to make "direct communicability to everyone […] a criterion of truth", while at the same time conceding that the truth of the claims raised by privileged experience can and should be itself submitted to intersubjective debate.[57] Still, one might ask how successful

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[52] See Geuss, *Outside Ethics*, pp. 128–30.
[53] See Boltanski, *Distant Suffering*.
[54] See Benzer, *The Sociology of Theodor Adorno*, p. 138.
[55] As hinted at above, this does not mean to deny that there are clear-cut cases of suffering, which Adorno's theory seems better equipped to address.
[56] "The critique of privilege has become a privilege: that is how dialectical the course of the world is" (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 41).
[57] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, pp. 41–2.

Adorno's argument actually is. *Contra* Freyenhagen[58], it is my conviction that his defence is far from being compelling. In particular, one might challenge the self-authenticating character Adorno allots to the truth disclosed in critical experience, according to which the latter would allow to gain a universally valid insight into the malaise of society as a whole. To my eyes, through such a theoretical move Adorno appoints himself and presumably those who share his highly inflated sensibility to the custody of the truth of experience, while consigning the majority of his fellow citizens to their doomed fate. Indeed, being "its own index", truth might even enter contexts of justification but remains unintelligible to the great public, because "today every step towards communication sells truth out and makes it false".[59] As a result, by letting his representative role be inflected by a kind of "priestly pretentiousness"[60] that stands at odds with his otherwise fallibilistic and self-critical stance, Adorno turns critical theory into a matter for a restricted few, instead of providing the deceived masses with the strategic tools to engage in processes of resistance oriented to a radical change from below of the dominant social order.[61]

In sum, in this section I have argued that positive interpretations of Adorno's enterprise are difficult to square with his commitment to the austere doctrine of

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[58] Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy*, pp. 248–49.
[59] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, pp. 41–2, translation amended. On this point see also Zuidervaart, *Social Philosophy after Adorno*, pp. 97–101.
[60] Bittner, "Critique", p. 13. Bittner actually employs this phrase in the context of a different argument. He claims that the point from which the world is condemned in Adorno's critical theory is that of redemption. Given his commitment to not speaking about redemption, however, Adorno "could not say by comparison to what the present state of things shows itself deficient", whereby "*this commitment* made his critical theory a critique 'from nowhere'" (Ibid., p. 12). As Bittner continues, "Adorno's pretence to look upon the world in the light of redemption is outrageously pretentious […]. Never having seen redemption, how is he to tell whether it is indeed its light that guides his critique and not just his individual tastes and antipathies […]? The attitude is priestly: "'Knowing about these things as little as anyone else, I still presume to announce to you how the Messiah is going to see the world'".
[61] One can detect a further problem: whereas he contends that the social totality affords chances to sabotage its perverted universality, Adorno never properly specifies what cultural and material conditions facilitate the engagement in critical experience. The fact that some randomly picked individuals can have such an experience, then, turns into an unexpected grace, whose light risks soon being out due to the ever-growing expansion of the capitalist exchange abstraction.

substantive and epistemic negativism. Relying on recent scholarship, I then have shown that metaethical negativism represents only a partial solution to Adorno's normativity problem. The issues raised by Adorno's negative approach are a consequence of his thorough pessimism. Unless the latter is legitimate (and I have tried to cast some doubts on that), the normativity problem and the solution Adorno proposes become pointless and inexpedient strictures, which risk weakening the disruptive power of theory.

2. Why Fight? Foucault's Answer

If there is no easy solution to the normativity problem posed by Adorno's work, accounting for the normativity of Foucault's archaeo-genealogical critique is an equally challenging task, which has repeatedly solicited the efforts of his detractors and supporters alike. Refuting those oversimplified readings according to which Foucault would engage in criticism without "justifying his own preferences"[62], here I shall start by clearing the ground of some tendentious interpretations of Foucault's work, whose allegations misrepresent the kind of project he is committed to. I shall then provide a detailed account of the normative orientation at the basis of Foucault's critical philosophy, which should be traced in his conceptualization of freedom as self-transformation. This will enable me to defend Foucault from Fraser's charge of genetic fallacy, while at the same time clarifying the exemplary nature of his archaeo-genealogical method. Finally, the section will conclude by pointing out the major limitations of Foucault's normative strategy.

Perhaps, the most common charge to which genealogy is liable is that of genetic fallacy. This is precisely the kind of objection Fraser moves against Foucault in an

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[62] Veyne, "The Final Foucault and His Ethics", p. 229.

important contribution to the Foucault/Habermas debate. At the outset, Fraser correctly notes that Habermas fails to recognize the real target of Foucault's criticism: the latter does not reject modernity *simpliciter*, but rather the universalistic interpretation of the humanist ideals of modernity.[63] Indeed, Foucault clearly regards Enlightenment modernity and humanism as standing "in a state of tension rather than identity".[64] According to Fraser, however, Foucault has never clarified the grounds of his rejection of the humanist regime. She considers three possible interpretations: a conceptual, a strategic, and a normative one. For my purposes here, I shall focus on the last one, which takes Foucault to think that humanism is intrinsically undesirable. In order to make her case, Fraser formulates the following hypothesis:

> Imagine a perfected disciplinary society in which [….] disciplinary norms would have become so thoroughly internalized that they would not be experienced as coming from without. The members of this society would […] be autonomous. [...] But, it is claimed, this would not be freedom.[65]

Although she believes Foucault is correct in linking autonomy to the internalization of disciplinary norms, Fraser argues that Habermas would accept this picture and say "if that's discipline, I am for it", because "there is no good reason to oppose such a society". To the contrary, Foucault seems to insist that a completely panopticized society is the objectionable "outcome of a historical process of hierarchical, asymmetrical coercion wherein people have been, in Nietzsche parlance, 'bred' to autonomy".[66] Fraser contends that Foucault's argument invites genetic fallacy, since it derives normatively ambitious conclusions from empirical insights into our own

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[63] Fraser, "Michel Foucault: 'A Young Conservative'?", p. 186.
[64] Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?", p. 314.
[65] Ibid., pp. 202–03.
[66] Fraser, "Michel Foucault: 'A Young Conservative'?", p. 204.

history, thus generating "normative confusions".[67] These normative confusions could be dispelled only if Foucault were able to elaborate "a new paradigm of freedom"[68] separate from the vocabulary of humanism, which would allow him to explain what is wrong with a fully panopticized society. But, since that is not the case, Foucault's rejection of humanism remains unwarranted. In short, being trapped between his attempt to suspend the liberal question of the normative legitimacy of modern power and his outright condemnation of biopower, for Fraser, Foucault lacks "an adequate normative perspective"[69], a shortfall that impairs the empirical results of his inquiries. As Koopman has recently proposed[70], a potential response to Fraser's accusation consists in showing that Foucault's archaeo-genealogical enterprise is neither subversive nor vindicatory, but rather aims at discerning the dangers characterizing our present:

> I would like to do the genealogy of problems, of *problématiques*. My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is *dangerous*, which is not exactly the same as *bad*. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do.[71]

To state it otherwise, for Foucault, critique can maintain its role of "counter-power" only so long as "it gives up posing the question of power in terms of good and bad, in order to pose it in terms of existence"[72]. This means that Foucault's picture of critique is not that of a measuring activity directed at assessing whether certain practices, *dispositifs*, and conceptions are illegitimate or wrong by means of a give set of

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[67] See Fraser, "Foucault on Modern Power".
[68] Fraser, "Michel Foucault: 'A Young Conservative'?", p. 205.
[69] Fraser, "Foucault on Modern Power", p. 33.
[70] See Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique*, pp. 88–90.
[71] Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics", p. 256, emphasis added. In this sense, Dreyfus and Rabinow claim that "his [Foucault's] aim has never been to denounce power per se nor to propound truth but to use his analysis to shed light on the specific dangers that each specific type of power/knowledge produces" (Dreyfus and Rabinow, "What is Maturity?", p. 116).
[72] Foucault, "La philosophie analytique de la politique", p. 540.

standards. Rather, the point of critique is to problematize the dangerous nature of these very same practices, *dispositifs*, and conceptions in the attempt to explain how they have contingently come to constrain our present modes of self-constitution, thereby showing that the historical problematizations they replicate can have alternative solutions. As a result, Foucault does not commit a genetic fallacy because, far from drawing normative justifications, his archaeo-genealogical enterprise is oriented by the more modest task of laying bare the dangers inherent to our modernity. According to Koopman, the decisive advantage of this method is to show that present practices can get put to bad uses without implying *any* normative evaluation about these practices. He remarks that such an account seems to be supported by Foucault's own words: in a late interview, Foucault is asked about his stance vis-à-vis Habermas' negative appraisal of Nietzsche's propensity to conflate genesis and validity. Foucault's answer is apparently unambiguous: "I think there is no relation between genesis and validity". Accordingly, Foucault's work seems to be only a normatively neutral reconstruction of genesis, whereby it is up to the reader to choose whether to approve or reject the current practices. However, in my view, the remainder of the abovementioned response – which Koopman reports but fails to unpack – complicates the picture: "the problem is", Foucault continues, "how could it be valid, at a certain moment, in certain context?".[73] While I regard the first half of Foucault's response as confirming that his project does not forward robust and definitive judgements about the badness of our practices, I think that the archaeo-genealogical analysis of how certain practices have turned out to be valid in a specific context does imply a normatively more modest assessment, which Foucault

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[73] M. Foucault (1983), "Ethics and Politics", unedited and unpublished full interview with P. Rabinow, R. Rorty, M. Jay, L. Lowenthal, and C. Taylor, at the University of California at Berkeley in April 1983 (for a complete transcription see M. Foucault, *Discussion with Michel Foucault*, IMEC/Fonds Michel Foucault, D 250(8). Excerpts of this interview were later published in Foucault, "Politics and Ethics: An Interview").

formulates in terms of the potential dangerousness determined by the structural enmeshment of their validity with power relations. There are several reasons for this view: firstly, it suits well with the rhetorical tone of Foucault's work and, as we shall see in the next chapter, with the epistemological and political primacy of resistance in his analysis of modern power. Secondly, Foucault's archaeo-genealogies are more normatively oriented than Koopman admits because their particular choice is motivated by the reprehensible effects the historical problematizations they reconstruct have on contemporary life, which demand to be opposed. Thirdly, as Bernstein puts it, "the very notion of danger is itself *value-laden*".[74] Indeed, the claim that a given practice is fraught suggests normative attentiveness to the practice in question due to the negative implications it may engender. Accordingly, pace Koopman, speaking about dangers demands clarification of the interpretative-evaluative perspective from which these dangers are specified, thus explaining why the fully panopticized society Fraser depicts should be resisted. Now, it is exactly to such a task I shall turn, in the attempt to reply to the following questions: Why is power "dangerous"? For whom? And finally what is the normative orientation enabling Foucault's own talk about dangers?

Before moving on, I would like head off right from the start another potential misinterpretation of Foucault's philosophical project. In *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* Habermas argues that Foucault's critical history of thought is premised upon an evaluative ethico-political bias which never finds its fully-fledged thematization, and therefore one is forced to consider Foucault's archaeo-genealogies as being "cryptonormative". For Habermas, Foucault's project can be described as a "nonparticipatory, ascetic description of kaleidoscopically changing practices of

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[74] Bernstein, "Foucault: Critique as Philosophical Ethos", p. 227. See also Allen, "The Entanglement of Power and Validity: Foucault and Critical Theory", pp. 92–4.

power", according to which "validity claims are functionalistically *reduced* to the effects of power".[75] On this reading, "contrasting his critique of power with the 'analysis of truth' in such a way that the former becomes deprived of the normative yardsticks it would have to borrow from the latter"[76], Foucault's radical critique of modernity is liable of a performative contradiction, which undercuts the cryptic commitment of his genealogy to what Habermas himself describes as "a picture of undamaged intersubjectivity".[77] However, it is my contention that Habermas portrays a deeply misleading picture of Foucault's work. Foucault explicitly claims that he never reduces validity claims to power relations.[78] Rather, moving from the singular systems of power-knowledge within which he is enmeshed, Foucault seeks to problematize the dangerous interconnectedness between validity and power marking the supposedly universal limits of the juridical and "decentred" consciousness Habermas postulates as the apical stage of European modernization, thereby opening up the theoretical and practical space for thinking and acting differently.[79] Hence, when compared with Habermas', Foucault's contextual approach has the decisive advantage of being capable of reflexively challenging the historical situatedness of its own point of view through the archaeo-genealogical exploration of the different modes of problematization defining the subject's forms of experience:

> what is philosophy today […] if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on
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> itself? […] [Philosophy] is entitled to explore what might be changed, in its own
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> thought, through the practice of a knowledge that is foreign to it. The "essay" – which

[75] Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, p. 275–76, emphasis added.
[76] Habermas, "Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present", p. 154, translation amended.
[77] Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, p. 337.
[78] "When I talk about power relations and games of truth, I am absolutely not saying that games of truth are just concealed power relations – that would be a horrible exaggeration. My problem […] is in understanding how truth games are set up and how they are connected with power relations" (Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom", p. 296).
[79] For a helpful Foucauldian critique of the "decentred form of subjectivity" presupposed by Habermas' critical theory see Tully, "To Think and Act Differently", p. 94–105.

should be understood as the assay or test by which, in the game of truth, one undergoes changes, and not as the simplistic appropriation of others for the purpose of communication – is the living substance of philosophy.[80]

Against the background of these remarks, it should not be surprising that Foucault blames Habermas' identification of the notion of communicative action with the standard of validity for adjudicating between legitimate and illegitimate forms of social interaction: "the idea that there could exist a state of communication that would allow games of truth to circulate freely, without any constraints or coercive effects, seems utopian to me", Foucault claims in a late interview.[81] Grounded upon the regulative function of the juridical notion of the decentred world-view, Habermas own conception cannot but appear utopian to Foucault's eyes because it ends up insulating argumentative processes of deliberation from the strategic relations of power associated with them. Yet, from a Habermasian perspective, one could reply that without a neat separation between validity and power any talk about freedom becomes hollow. As other prominent critics like Taylor, Walzer, and Rorty[82] have argued, in fact, freedom can only be conceived of as liberation from power altogether, or as freedom to subject oneself to a form of power whose norms have been agreed upon in conditions free from power constraints. In this respect, since Foucault's constructivist notion of power strips the very idea of liberation of its emancipatory force, any reference he makes to freedom should be read at best as a revision of his anti-humanist stance, or, at worst, as the expression of an incoherent and nihilistic

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[80] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, pp. 8-9.
[81] Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom", p. 298.
[82] See Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth"; Walzer, "The Politics of Michel Foucault"; and Rorty, "Moral Identity and Private Autonomy".

attitude linked with an anarchic and ultimately "aesthetic decisionism".[83] On my view, however, it is easy to note that these allegations are raised on the basis of a skewed playing field, which looses sight of the stakes of Foucault's own project. Unlike these authors, Foucault starts from the key thought that one should not speak of an antagonistic confrontation between power and freedom, but rather of "an 'agonism' – of a relationship that is at the same time of mutual incitement and struggle"[84] –, whereby alternative possibilities of freedom are already present, albeit in a latent way, *within* existing games of power. Indeed, Foucault maintains that, as a mode of action directed at structuring the field of possible action of others, power does presuppose at its heart human subjects' freedom to conduct themselves in various ways, which include not only that of shaping themselves as governable subjects but also that of resisting the government of their conduct. Accordingly, making implicit reference to Habermas' theory, Foucault claims that

> the problem […] is not to try to dissolve them [i.e. power relations] in the utopia of completely transparent communication but to acquire the rules of law, the management techniques, and also the ethics […] that will allow us to play these games of power with *as little domination as possible*.[85]

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[83] Walzer, "The Politics of Michel Foucault", p. 53. Admittedly, Rorty proposes a subtler version of this criticism. According to him, Foucault would tend to conflate two roles: on the one hand, as a public intellectual, he was a "humanitarian bourgeois liberal". On the other, as a private citizen, he was a "knight of autonomy" persistently engaged in a solipsistic search for self-transformation. This confusion led Foucault to adopt a quasi-anarchic stance, whereby his desire for autonomy is dangerously transposed at the level of society. For Rorty, Foucault should have separated the two roles by delimiting his quest for autonomy to the realm of negative liberty guaranteed by the liberal state, whose point is "not to invent or create anything, but simply to make it as easy as possible for people to achieve their widely different private ends without hurting each other" (Rorty, "Moral Identity and Private Autonomy", pp. 330–31). As a consequence, Rorty proposes a depoliticization of Foucault's notion of freedom, which confines the latter to the dimension of private choice.

[84] Foucault, "The Subject and Power", p. 342.

[85] Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom", p. 298, translation amended and emphasis added.

The importance of this passage for my argument can be hardly overestimated: here, I think Foucault indirectly identifies freedom as the normative orientation of his own critical discourse.[86] In order to make my case, I shall appropriate (albeit with several provisos), Patton's argument according to which Foucault's reformulation of power relations in terms of action upon the free action of others relies on a "thin", minimal conception of the subject of thought and action. In an often-unacknowledged move, Foucault pits the idea of power as a relational structure (power over) against the notion of power as *potere* (power to), namely "as being endowed with capacities or possibilities for action".[87] According to this minimal account, then, human subjects are conscious and self-conscious *agents* who can freely affect the way they reflect and act upon themselves and others. Conversely, bearing this difference in mind[88], in Chapter 2 we have seen that the later Foucault recognizes a dangerous tendency of power relations to form asymmetrical and systematized governmental technologies, whose institutionalisation might crystallize into hardly reversible and hierarchical states of domination where the exercise of and opportunity for freedom reaches its smallest margin. *Contra* Patton's account, however, for Foucault states of domination are just an exceptional case in power relations. That is why Foucault concentrates on

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[86] Here, I shall utilize Koopman's distinction between orientations and ethical commitments: while the latter indicate the "conditioned practical matters of ethics" (contents, theses, rules, equipments, techniques, and positions), orientations refer to conditions of possibility for ethical responsiveness, which can transcend the specific context of their deployment (see especially Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique*, pp. 189–90). As one will better evince from the next chapter, although I deem it very useful and insightful, I still cannot see how Koopman can legitimately apply this distinction to Foucault's own work by indexing care of the self, *parrhesia*, the philosophical way of life, and the aesthetics of existence under the label of ethical commitments. Due to space constraints, I shall leave the analysis of this issue for another occasion.

[87] Patton, "Foucault's Subject of Power", p. 66. Indeed, Foucault regards an exercise of power as "a set of actions on possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; it releases or contrives, makes more probable or less; in the extreme, it constrains or forbids absolutely, but it is always a way of acting upon one or more acting subjects by virtue of their *acting or being capable of action*" (Foucault, "The Subject and Power", p. 341, emphasis added).

[88] Although some of the criticisms I am examining were formulated before Foucault made explicit the distinction between "power over" and "power to" in his later writings, Patton has compellingly argued that this difference was already at work in his earlier genealogical works. Here, however, the terms Foucault employs are diverse: "power" stands for "power over", while "force" replaces "power to" (see. Patton, "Taylor and Foucault on Power and Freedom", especially pp. 272–74).

governmental technologies as those systems of power that produces a condition of aspectival captivity, according to which modern individuals' experience *qua* agents is constrained by their unrecognized subjection to a self-imposed perspective that shapes the putatively universal, necessary, and obligatory limits of their forms of subjectivity. As a result, Foucault's critics are mistaken when they claim that he does not provide the normative resources to establish why power ought to be resisted[89]. While the unquestioned picture of critique they operate with forces them to demand from him the articulation of universal normative criteria for assessing the validity of moral norms and the legitimacy of social practices, they fail to appreciate the normative orientation to freedom as self-transformation underpinning Foucault's archaeo-genealogical critique of the modern regime of truth: indeed, insofar as he is able to explain how our condition of aspectival captivity has emerged from a historical web of discursive and material processes restricting our capacity to recognize ourselves as free agents, Foucault shows that we are ethically and politically motivated to revolt against the power relations shoring up this condition:

> The most important question is not whether a culture without restraints is possible or even desirable but whether the system of constraints in which a society functions leaves individuals the *liberty to transform the system*. […] a system of constraint becomes truly *intolerable* when the individuals who are affected by it don't have the means of modifying it.[90]

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[89] Albeit in more careful way, Koopman has recently reiterated the charge in *Genealogy as Critique* (see chapter 6).
[90] Foucault adds: "This can happen when such a system becomes intangible as a result of its being considered a moral or religious imperative, or a necessary consequence of medical science" (Foucault, "The Politics of Sexuality", p. 294, emphasis added). Thus, Rajchman is absolutely correct in portraying Foucault's politics as a post-revolutionary "politics of revolt". However, he falls short of answering the question "why revolt?" (see Rajchman, *Michel Foucault: The Freedom of Philosophy*, especially chapter 2).

Hence, by assuming and at the same time reviving the normative value accorded to the "acquisition of capabilities and the struggle for freedom […] throughout the entire history of Western societies"[91], the goal of Foucault's archaeo-genealogical method is to provide us with a different view of ourselves, which enables us to see that we share a common reason not only to question the historical problematizations at the basis of the contingent practices constitutive of our present, but also to embark on the reconstructive work of experimentally tailoring self-transformative responses to these very same problematizations.[92] In short, as a partisan mode of inquiry, Foucault's critical ethos seeks to "give new impetus […] to the undefined work of freedom"[93], facilitating our engagement in games of power with a minimum of domination:

> I think that it is here that we will find the real possibility of constructing a history of what we have done and, at the same time, a diagnosis of what we are. […] this theoretical analysis would have a political dimension […] that relates to what we are willing to accept in our world – to accept, to refuse, and to change, both in ourselves and in our circumstances. In sum, it is a question of searching for a new kind of critical philosophy. Not a critical philosophy that seeks to determine the conditions and the limits of our possible knowledge of the object, but a critical philosophy that seeks the conditions and the indefinite possibilities of transforming the subject, of transforming ourselves.[94]

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[91] Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?", p. 317.

[92] Although he misses the reconstructive side of Foucault's critical problematization of the present and the self-transformative nature of his conception of freedom, for a somewhat similar point see Owen, "Orientation and Enlightenment", p. 36.

[93] Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?", p. 316.

[94] Foucault, "Subjectivity and Truth", pp. 152–53. Hence, my argument cuts deeper than Patton's (see Patton, "Foucault's Subject of Power", p. 73). Indeed, this does not explain merely how resistance occurs (as a quasi-mechanistic reaction of a force against another force), but rather accounts for the normative basis of critical resistance.

At this stage, we are in a good position to understand why for Foucault Fraser's picture of "panoptical autonomy" ought to be resisted. Although the hypothetical disciplinary society Fraser depicts describes a state of structural autonomy, from Foucault's perspective such a society should be rejected on normative grounds because it would engender a form of aspectival captivity blocking the more dynamic realization of freedom as orientation to self-transformation. Indeed, a fully panopticized society would dangerously present the ideals of humanism as a "universal model [valid] for any kind of liberty"[95], restricting freedom to the horizon of possibilities for thought and action connected to the notion of autonomy as the commitment to the preservation of the democratic order granted by ever-refined mechanisms of disciplinary power. For Foucault, instead, the point of his archaeo-genealogical inquiries is precisely to question the historical limits the regime of truth associated with humanism imposes on our experience as modern subjects, in order to broaden our sense of the possible and to create a new economy of power. In other terms, as the normative basis of his account of modern dangers, Foucault's conception of freedom as self-transformation should be clearly demarcated from normative appeals to Kantian autonomy as the power to rationally determine one's choice without interference within a given set of pre-established options. If freedom were conceived only in these terms, one would run the risk of mis-representing freedom in terms of the sovereignty-based picture of the juridico-repressive paradigm of power, while missing how modern biopolitics operates by governmentally pre-arranging – both in a synchronic and diachronic way – the field of possibilities of what one can think and do. Rather, far from being reducible to the positive space of negative liberty promoted by the liberal (as well as neoliberal) rationality of

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[95] Foucault, "Truth, Power, Self: An Interview", p. 15

government, my claim is that Foucault's notion of freedom should be better understood as a practice of self-empowerment involving at one and the same time two different but tightly interrelated axes: one the one hand, a disobedient process of subtraction from the discursive regime of identification set in advance by the dominant structures of power and, on the other, a political act of creative stylization marking any concrete engagement in new modes of subjectivation geared to fashion alternative responses to the historical problematizations that condition who we are. As an illustration, discussing the gay movement, Foucault asserts:

> It is […] necessary to struggle to establish homosexual lifestyles, *existential choices* in which sexual relations with people of the same sex will be important. It is not enough to *tolerate within a more general way of life* the possibility of making love with someone of the same sex […]. […] It's not only a matter of integrating this strange little practice of making love with someone of the same sex into pre-existing cultures; it's a matter of *constructing* [*créer*] *cultural forms.*[96]

The issue is not merely to recognize one's mode of living as a possibility among others within the social fabric, but rather to enable individuals' choices to break free from the norms and categories of the prevailing social order, while fostering their capacity to trigger specific changes through the practical invention of "modalities of relationship, modes of existence, types of values, forms of exchange between individuals which would be really new".[97] Foucault's conception of freedom, therefore, seems to appeal to a renewal of the Enlightenment notion of maturity,

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[96] Foucault, "The Social Triumph of Sexual Will", p. 157, translation amended and emphasis added.
[97] Ibid., pp. 159–60, translation amended. In this sense, Han correctly speaks of Foucault's notion of freedom as "*ontologically disclosive power*" (see Han, "Nietzsche and Foucault on Style", p. 12).

motivated by the challenge of discovering possible ways to disconnect the "growth of capabilities [*capacités*] […] from the intensification of power relations".[98]

On my view, though, it is crucial not to disjoin the capacity for maturity from its practical actualisation. In this respect, I think that Allen's characterization of Foucault's idea of freedom solely as "capacities for critical reflection and self-transformation"[99] runs the risk of conceptualizing freedom as if it could be assured by particular institutional arrangements, whereas Foucault insists that there is no other guarantee of freedom than freedom itself.[100] Unlike Kant, this means that Foucault understands freedom neither as submission to the moral law nor as a regulative idea, but rather as the exercise of a historically situated disclosive power that demarcates the limits beyond which the exercise of power becomes intolerable. Freedom, thus, exists only *in actu*, in the voluntary acts of creative desubjection of particular agents. Indeed, it is through our power of constant innovation alone that we can contrast the risk for freedom of being (re)captured by new *dispositifs* of seizure, in the hope that history's reservoir of existential possibilities will enable us to produce alternative cultural forms out of the materials, resources, and "styles" lodged in our culture. That is the reason why, for Foucault, archaeology and genealogy remain needed. The disclosure of new modes of life does not come out of the void, but rather out of the background of our historical, epistemic, social, and political determinations. By bringing to light the marginalized and historical forms of our current practices, Foucault's archaeo-genealogical critique not only reconstructs the contingent and strategic set of multiple relations between power and knowledge at the basis of the

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[98] Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?", p. 317.
[99] Allen, *The Politics of Our Selves*, p. 2. For a rejection of such a reading in terms of capacities, see Oksala, *Foucault on Freedom*, p. 188.
[100] Foucault, "Space, Knowledge, and Power", p. 355. In addition, Koopman correctly highlights that conceptualizing freedom only in terms of a capacity invites to think of it as being possessed by a transcendental subject of the kind Foucault strove to reject (Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique*, p. 208).

present context of intelligibility, but also tracks the lines of fissure where it begins to flake apart, thereby exposing the possibilities of its transformation.[101] Accordingly, pace its consensus-focused detractors (and in particular Rorty), Foucault's immanent form of critical self-reflection does not appeal to a preliminary assumption about the identity of the "we" implied in the normative question "what are we to do?", whose coordinates would define the conditions of legitimacy for criticism. Rather, Foucault rejects supposedly authentic "truths" about who we are, in order to clear up the space for the formation of a "we" in in the future.[102] The normative success of Foucault's archaeo-genealogical inquiries, therefore, depends on their fallible contribution to the development of a "community of action", whose participants are engaged in a deliberative test of the tactics, means, and interests they might pursue in their emancipatory struggle.

This means that Foucault's critical attitude does not consists in legislating what justice is on behalf of the oppressed, but rather in giving visibility to their struggles through the agonistic contestation of the limits constraining the forms of freedom within the social order generated by the historical confluence of the techniques of biopolitical government with the conceptual apparatus of humanism. Yet, one might object that Foucault never bothers to elaborate a justification of the commitment to freedom implicit in this practice of contestation. As Owen suggests, one might defend Foucault by noting that the commitment of his audience to the value of self-government releases him of this requirement.[103] Nonetheless, although Owen's

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[101] See Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics", p. 261: "Among the cultural inventions of mankind there is a treasury of devices, techniques, ideas, procedures, and so on, that cannot exactly be reactivated but at least constitute, or help to constitute, a certain point of view which can be very useful as a tool for analysing what's going on now – and to change it". See also Foucault, "What is Critique?", p. 62. For a Deleuzian reading of Foucault's conception of freedom erroneously based on the non-enunciable and aprioristic metaphysical category of "the outside", which Foucault already criticizes in the *Archaeology of Knowledge*, see Prozorov, *Foucault, Freedom and Sovereignty*.

[102] See Foucault, "Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations", pp. 114–15.

[103] Owen, "Criticism and Captivity", p. 225.

reading is certainly true given Foucault's endorsement of the Enlightenment project, I would insist that speaking only in terms of a commitment to self-government risks blurring the transformation of the "grammar of normativity"[104] Foucault seeks to produce in the attempt to relaunch this very same project. I shall thus propose a different interpretation, which relies on the exemplary nature of Foucault's critical attitude. To this end, consider the following passage:

> At every moment, step by step one must confront what one is thinking and saying with what one is doing, with what one is. […] I have always been concerned with linking together as tightly as possible the historical and the theoretical analysis of power relations, institutions, and knowledge, to the movements, critique, and experiences that call them into question in reality. If I have insisted on all this "practice", it has not been in order to "apply" ideas, but in order to put them to the test and modify them. The key to the personal poetic attitude of a philosopher is not to be sought in his ideas, as if it could be deduced from them, but rather in his philosophy-as-life, in his philosophical life, his ethos.[105]

The passage clearly shows the ethico-political connotation of Foucault's critical attitude, whereby the question is not so much to define how the intellectual should intervene into the social and political life of his community ("what one is to do?"), but rather what constitutes the ultimate standard for judging the validity and credibility of his stance ("who one is?"). In this sense, it is noteworthy to point out the attention Foucault devotes to the creation of an exemplary coincidence between *logos* and *bios*, whereby his own existence becomes the surface of exploratory processes of experimentation. Here, I am referring not only to the famous description

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[104] Butler, "What is Critique?", p. 306.
[105] Foucault, "Politics and Ethics: An Interview", p. 374.

of each of his studies as "a fragment of autobiography"[106] but also to Foucault's militant engagements in various struggles against specific relations of power (regarding mental illness or criminality, for instance).[107] Proving his own ethos, all these activities oriented to conjugate *logos* and *bios* enable Foucault to present himself as an *exemplum*, whose normative authority derives from the public recognition obtained from his addressees. On my view, however, such exemplarity is not limited to Foucault's figure as a public citizen. Rather, it comes to be reflected in the congruence Foucault establishes between his theoretical picture of critique as an emancipatory activity oriented to the production of a transformative view of our practices on the one hand, and, on the other, his creative deployment of new diagnostic concepts capable of disrupting the humanist regime of truth shaping the form of our experience. In other terms, through a neutralization of the normative effects implicit in the humanist vocabulary of legitimacy, truthfulness, and authenticity, Foucault's archaeo-genealogical reformulation of the concepts of power, knowledge, and subject expresses his appeal to the value of freedom as it underpins his historical problematizations of the present modes of self-constitution, a theoretical operation which *exemplifies* the politics of resistance Foucault calls for in the attempt to inspire communities of action motivated by the struggle against the double-bind of modern biopolitical power.[108]

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[106] Foucault, "So Is It Important to Think?", p. 458.

[107] For a thorough reconstruction of Foucault's political activism (especially of his engagement in the prisoner support movement during the early 1970s and with Solidarity trade union in Poland) see Hoffman, *Foucault and Power*. One should not forget to mention the personal "test" to which Foucault submitted his conception of identity through the indulgence in unconventional sexual practices (see Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*).

[108] Elsewhere, I have shown how in the last years of his life Foucault progressively comes to think of his own critical engagement as modelled on the exemplarity of the Socratic practice of *parrhesiastic* truth-telling (see Mascaretti, "Michel Foucault on Problematization, Parrhesia and Critique"). On the idea of Foucault's genealogy as exemplifying a creative ethics of resistance see also Owen, *Maturity and Modernity*, pp. 210–12.

Nevertheless, moving towards the conclusion of the section, I believe Foucault's normative approach is not without serious shortcomings. Firstly, one cannot gloss over the clash between the general perspective behind Foucault's critical project and some of his more circumstantial observations, where he makes appeal to "the universal" as the normative criterion for critique and political struggle. Consider, for instance, the following excerpt, which I take from a 1979 statement on the Iranian Revolution published in *Le Monde*:

> my theoretical ethic is opposite to theirs. It is "antistrategic": to be respectful when a singularity revolts, intransigent as soon as power violates the *universal*. A simple choice, a difficult job: for one must at the same time look closely, a bit beneath history, […] over what must *unconditionally limit it*. After all, that is my work.[109]

To my eyes, passages like this one are not only incoherent with respect to Foucault's sceptical rejection of universals, but they also leave pending a whole series of questions: what constitutes the universal Foucault is making reference to? And what justifies its assumption as a reason for revolting against power?

Secondly, as we have seen, for Foucault the dangerousness of power relations consists in their tendency to congeal into governmental technologies, which in turn might engender states of domination. Notwithstanding the lack of a compelling analysis of what drives the propensity for domination in a historically specific context, however, it seems to me that Foucault's appeal to freedom as self-transformation constitutes an insufficient normative resource to adjudicate between the various creative responses one can forward in order to contrast this tendency. Foucault could reply that it is not up to the critic to tell his addressees what needs to

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[109] Foucault, "Useless to Revolt?", p. 453, emphasis added.

be done. Critique only opens the space for potentially ameliorative changes, but the responsibility of designing and implementing the most effective responses rests with them. Nevertheless, Foucault also admits that the initiatives one can undertake are "*not equally dangerous*".[110] But that is precisely where Foucault's reasoning breaks off: indeed, he never clarifies what renders one course of action more appropriate and desirable than another, thereby failing to consider the role played by argumentative practices in the elaboration of one's critical position.

Finally, the inadequate attention Foucault pays to the level of argumentation has implications also for his conception of political struggle. Far from being limited to a confrontation between two opposing poles, in fact, political struggle involves complex dynamics that affect also those who are not directly invested by the power relations under examination. That is particularly true in democratic regimes, where the effectiveness of a certain struggle hangs upon its capacity to gain a foothold in the public opinion through the argumentative communication of the values and instances it defends. In his later studies Foucault was progressively led to acknowledge the relevance of this dimension, but nonetheless – due to his premature death – his remarks are left largely underdeveloped.[111] In any case, that should be read as the symptom not of Foucault's wish to return to the legislating figure of the universal intellectual, but rather of his awareness of the need for the intellectual to defend his views in a public discussion aimed at changing the *status quo*. Indeed, it is Foucault himself that claims to be

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[110] Foucault, "Ethics and Politics", as quoted in McLaren, *Feminism, Foucault, and Embodied Subjectivity*, p. 43, emphasis added. In another interview, for instance, Foucault states that to the problematization of the function of prison in the modern regime of punishment "one can reply by means of revolt, reform, or the destruction of prisons" (Foucault, "Luttes autour des prisons", p. 813, my translation).

[111] I have to leave the analysis of this very interesting aspect of Foucault's thought to another occasion. For some preliminary remarks see Sorrentino, *Il pensiero politico di Foucault*, especially pp. 246–75.

a little bit irritated by an attitude, which has been mine for a long time and which now I

do not subscribe to any more, according to which one says: our problem is to denounce

and to criticize; let them sort things out with their legislation and their reforms. That

does not seem to me a right attitude.[112]

In a nutshell, whereas Foucault *does* tell us why power ought to be resisted, I think

that his normative strategy remains wanting, since it falls short of elaborating on the

conceptual tools necessary to develop the reconstructive possibilities disclosed by his

critical endeavour.

3. Beyond Actuality: A New Sense of the Possible

In contrast to the received wisdom that they lack normative theorizing, the previous

two sections have clarified the normative core of Adorno's and Foucault's critical

projects of a historical problematization of our present, while directing the reader's

attention to their crucial failings. The dissimilarity in the ways in which Adorno and

Foucault articulate the normative weight of their theories at a first-order level is

evident and derives from the opposed attitudes shaping their view of contemporary

social reality.[113] Whereas Adorno's pessimism leads him to identify the basis of

normativity in an affective experience of revulsion against modernity's long unheard

history of suffering culminating in the all-pervasive processes of reification of

advanced capitalism, Foucault's work "rests on a postulate of absolute *optimism*"[114],

according to which his archaeo-genealogical researches are predicated upon the value

attributed to the practices of self-transformation embodied in the political struggles

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[112] Foucault, "Enfermement, psychiatrie, prison", p. 360, my translation.

[113] Aiming at showing the convergence of Adorno's and Foucault's respective accounts of the relationship between history and normativity, Allen glosses over this difference (see Allen, *The End of Progress*, chapter 5).

[114] Foucault, "Interview with Michel Foucault", p. 294, emphasis added.

against the double-bind of modern power they seek to promote. My claim, however, is that their strategies have a common normative goal. Premised upon the persuasion that "freedom in society is inseparable from enlightenment thinking"[115], the shared reason behind their inquiries consists in the attempt to give new impetus to the emancipatory thrust of Enlightenment modernity through a critical problematization that – adopting what Allen calls a "participant-observer" perspective – shows the desirability of a radical change capable of disentangling enlightenment rationality from the dangerous practices of power in which it has been embodied. This means that, far from resulting in an abstract dismissal of modernity's fundamental values, Adorno and Foucault seeks to transform our own normative commitments with a view to a better realization of our freedom in the future.[116] Against utopian speculations about the right life, Adorno and Foucault are modest and cautious enough to avoid grounding their claims in a fully-fledged, positive characterization of this future, which thereby remains open-ended. For Adorno, as we have seen, the good life is inaccessible within our total context of delusion, whereby confidence in any utopian vision of the "correct state of things"[117] is not only groundless but also counter-productive, because it will likely force effects that are extraneous to the original intents and legitimate any means deemed to be necessary to reach the projected end – even the most obnoxious ones. Likewise, whether they are conceived of as concrete goals or as regulative ideas, Foucault castigates utopias (and prophecies, for that matter) for prescribing off-the-peg and undemocratic models of a "society perfected" from above, which remain "essentially unreal" because they

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[115] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. xvi.

[116] See also Allen, *The End of Progress*, chapter 6. As far as Adorno is concerned, Allen closely follows Menke, who argues that Adorno employs a participant-observer perspective in order to promote a negative dialectical self-transcendence of the formal conception of morality marking the Enlightenment, a transformation of our normative commitments "necessary […] for moral purposes involving *others*" (Menke, "Genealogy and Critique", p. 305).

[117] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 352.

neglect social complexity and advocate fictitious arrangements outside of power relations.[118] Being aware of the risks intrinsic in substantive commitments to positive values, therefore, Adorno and Foucault opt for an alternative normative orientation, according to which the intolerability of the modes of captivity elucidated by their investigations motivates their search for emancipatory possibilities within our experience. In this sense, I shall show that Adorno and Foucault propose a significant reformulation of the notion of possibility.[119] Traditionally, at least since Aristotle, possibility has been thought of as subordinated to actuality, whereby what is possible depends on the pre-given horizon of possibilities opened up by the existing state of affairs. Adorno and Foucault, instead, seek to overturn this hierarchical relation by devising a kind of possibility that is not reducible to either mere logical possibilities or to the possibilities sanctioned by actuality. Following his imageless materialism, in fact, Adorno thinks that the radical transformation of our present reality hangs upon the disclosure of yet unheard-off possibilities by way of an exact interpretation of the contradictions marking our wrong life. [120] These possibilities are not formal possibilities, since their modality cannot be defined simply in terms of their freedom from logical contradictions. As "something which is not" but which at the same time is not "a pure nonbeing"[121], however, they also need to be demarcated from real possibilities as those possibilities already pre-delineated in *nuce* in the structural tendencies of the social order. Rather, for Adorno, they describe an intermediary kind

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[118] Foucault, "Different Spaces", p. 178. For a more detailed analysis see also Kelly, "Against Prophecy and Utopia".

[119] The convergence of Adorno and Foucault on this point goes unnoticed in the existing literature. While there are a few commentaries focusing on Adorno's conception of possibility, I could not find any work dealing with Foucault's.

[120] "Society, […] if it is to be more than a mere technique, can only crystallize at all around a conception of the just society. The latter, however, is not to be contrasted with existing society in an abstract manner, simply as an ostensible value, but rather it arises from criticism, that is, from society's awareness of its contradictions and its necessity" (Adorno, "On the Logic of Social Sciences", p. 118).

[121] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 393.

of possibility[122]: they are different possibilities that are precluded by our manipulated comprehension of what is realisable according to the effectiveness of the real, but which nonetheless can be constructed through the determinate negation of the latter's specific, reified conditions (e.g. the negation of alienated labour in light of the possibility of alternative modes of production based on cooperative solidarity[123] or the negation of deprivation thanks to the possibilities opened up by the advancement of the technical forces of production[124]). Thus, Adorno's method reveals alternative possibilities that change our view of reality, being oriented to the realization of that non-identical "more" which society blocks in order to reproduce itself and maintain its illusion:

> [Utopia], the consciousness of possibility, clings to the concrete as what is undistorted. It is what is possible, never the immediately realized, which obstructs utopia; that is why in the middle of the existent it appears abstract. The inextinguishable colour comes from non-being. Thought, a piece of existence, serves non-being, which thought reaches, albeit only negatively.[125]

Similarly, far from pointing to merely abstract possibilities, the task of Foucault's archaeo-genealogical inquiries is to enlighten concrete possibilities of transforming ourselves that cannot be accommodated within the structured space of what is actually possible for thought and action according to the governmental and impoverished logic of the modern *dispositifs* of power-knowledge. What Foucault pleads for, in fact, is a reordering of the existing grid of intelligibility, which would

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[122] See also Bernstein, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics*, chapter 9.
[123] Adorno, *Introduction to Sociology*, p. 43.
[124] Adorno, "Progress", p. 144.
[125] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, pp. 56–7, Redmond's translation used and amended. For a very helpful account of Adorno's understanding of modality see MacDonald, "'What Is, Is More than It Is': Adorno and Heidegger on the Priority of Possibility".

change the categorical framework one employs to understand actuality and real possibilities by introducing "a whole series of choices, a whole series of other values and choices for which there are not yet real possibilities".[126] Again speaking about the gay movement, for example, Foucault states:

> Sexual choices create modes of life. To be gay means that these choices spread across the entire life, it is also a way to reject the proposed modes of existence, to render sexual choice the operator of a change of existence. […] One should use one's sexuality in order to discover, invent new relationships. […] To interrogate our relationship to homosexuality amounts to *desire a world where these relationships are possible*.[127]

In this respect, as the expression of the surplus of history over its own tendential closure, for Foucault the concept of possibility describes experimental "virtualities"[128] calling for heterogeneity and difference, whose actualization from within the current regime would contrast the aspectival captivity constraining what we might become.

In conclusion, the radical social change Adorno and Foucault advocate rests upon the priorisation of a kind of middle-ground possibility over actuality, which invites us to

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[126] Foucault, "The Social Triumph of the Sexual Will", p. 157.

[127] Foucault, "Entretien avec M. Foucault", p. 1114, my translation and emphasis added.

[128] Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life", p. 138. Here Foucault's use of the term "virtualities" might be misleading. Notwithstanding their complex relationship (for a recent account of which see the essays in *Foucault Studies* n. 17), Foucault is not Deleuze. According to Deleuze, the notion of "virtuality" points to an ontological repository of experimental possibilities that escapes the dimension of history, being rather the proper concern of philosophy as the activity of creating new concepts (see the contrast between history and becoming in Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, p. 110). On his reading, then, virtuality becomes a pure reservoir, which ultimately provides "the guarantee of an open future" (see Patton, *Deleuze and the Political*, p. 27). By refuting such "blueprint for change", instead, Foucault employs the term "virtualities" to denote possibilities of open-ended transformation, which are always historically specific and therefore never assured. So, why does Foucault keep referring to the notion of "virtuality"? I have not been able to find a clear answer to this question. However, I presume that its employment is motivated by Foucault's will to preserve the element of creation that according to him (and Deleuze for that matter) marks the relationship between virtuality on the one hand and actuality or actualization on the other. Indeed, it seems legitimate to claim that for Foucault the passage from virtuality to actualization involves a creative process, whereby once actualized a possibility does not (necessarily) resemble its enabling conditions.

avoid rejecting as impossible whatever does not adapt to the present reality. The point, then, will be to investigate the effective forms this refusal can take, namely the practices of resistance one might level against the exhaustion of the possible. It is to this exploration that I turn next.

Chapter 5
Resistance

As we have seen, the goal of Adorno's and Foucault's histories of the present is to unearth not only the self-imposed forms of domination governing the ways we think and act in the world but also the materials we can take up in the attempt to break our subjection. One might reformulate this claim by saying that Adorno's and Foucault's works converge in their critical stance against fascism, where the latter refers both to a historically situated political regime and to a contemporary mode of life. Indeed, as Foucault explains in a 1975 panel discussion,

> the problem for the generation which turned twenty in the 1930s was how to fight fascism, […] how to fight the different forms, the different milieux in which fascism appeared. […] I think that what has happened since 1960 is characterized by the appearance of new forms of fascism, […] and new forms of the fight against fascism. And the role of the intellectual, since the sixties, has been precisely to situate […] him or herself in such a way as to both make apparent forms of fascism which are unfortunately not recognized, or too easily tolerated, to describe them, to try to render them intolerable, and to define the specific form of struggle that can be undertaken against fascism.[1]

Adorno himself could have pronounced these words. The hallmark of his enterprise is expressed by the fight against fascist patterns of consciousness and behaviour, whose ultimate reason lies in what Adorno thinks is the new categorical imperative Hitler has imposed onto "unfree mankind: to arrange their thoughts and actions so that

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[1] Foucault, "Schizo-Culture: On Prisons and Psychiatry", p. 179.

Auschwitz will not repeat itself, so that nothing similar will happen".[2] Here, therefore, what we shall address are Adorno's and Foucault's responses to the ethico-political challenge posed by the "fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behaviour, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us".[3] How is it possible to contest the systems of power marking our late modern societies? What effective modes can resistance assume within the present socio-historical context? And finally, how is it possible to sustain a radical change towards a better future? To reply to these questions, I shall divide this final chapter into three sections. After illustrating the proximities marking their shared appraisal of the political role of critique, Section 1 will compare Adorno's picture of a suspended life of resistance with the prospects of resistance Foucault develops in the first half of 1970s. Whereas Adorno confines practical advice to a minimal set of negativist and defensive recommendations geared to minimize our ideological involvement in the badness of our modern social world, Foucault already encourages more progressive forms of resistance, whose main target is represented by our condition of aspectival captivity. However, I shall also show that Foucault's early war-like model of domination seriously impedes him from developing a fully-fledged account of these modalities of resistance. Section 2, then, will turn to examine the shift produced by his late governmental view of power in his conception of resistance, according to which his reflections on the Hellenistic and Roman practices of care of the self provide the basis for the elaboration of a politics of the governed as an ethics of creativity that might be effectively wielded against modern (neo)liberal governmentality. In conclusion, Section 3 will seek to bridge the discrepancy between their respective proposals by suggesting the need to integrate Foucault's appeal to

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[2] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 365.
[3] Foucault, "Preface to *Anti-Oedipus*", p. 108.

resistive practices of freedom with Adorno's politics of suffering.

1. Critique, Politics, and the Ethics of Resistance

As we have seen above, for Adorno, utopian reconciliation necessitates a wholesale transformation of the current social order, whereby the quest for the right life cannot be disjoined from "the quest for the right form of politics".[4] One might imagine that what Adorno has in mind by this phrase are organized collective projects motivated by the desire to put an end to capitalist exchange society. Adorno, however, believes that we do "not live in a revolutionary situation"[5]. Rather, as the opening sentence of *Negative Dialectics* attests[6], for him "this is the time for theory".[7] This means that today the task of critical theory is to inquiry into the historical reasons for why revolution in advanced Western states has failed, leading to a block of "emphatic praxis".[8] Adorno holds that two reasons in particular have played a decisive role: contrary to what Marx had predicted with his immiseration thesis, democratic welfare states have alleviated the painful contradictions of the capitalist system by improving the workers' living standards[9], while, at the same time, dulling their class consciousness through the ideological psycho-technologies of culture industry and political propaganda. Furthermore, since individuals are deprived of real autonomy, the very possibility of collective action has become questionable, whereby any political project – whether reformist or revolutionary – is destined to slip into a form

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[4] Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, p. 176.
[5] Adorno and Horkheimer, "Towards a New Manifesto?", p. 61.
[6] "Philosophy […] lives on because the moment of its realisation was missed" (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 3, translation amended)
[7] Adorno, *Metaphysics*, p. 126.
[8] Adorno tends to employ the phrase "emphatic practice" as a synonym of a total social transformation of the existing order, which should be distinguished from the idea of a communist revolution (see Kraushaar, *Frankfurter Schule 2*, p. 652).
[9] Adorno, "Reflections on Class Theory", p. 103, translation amended.

of paralysed and potentially repressive "pseudo-praxis".[10] As a result, extending his austere negativism from the private to the public sphere, Adorno concludes that under the present circumstances theory must take priority over praxis not only as a critical reflection on the shortcomings of revolutionary thought, but also as a renewed inquiry into the historical possibilities of practice itself.[11] Put differently, what the failure of previous attempts at changing the world should teach us, for Adorno, is that theory must be valued "more highly at this point"[12], because praxis without preliminary theoretical analysis is weak and fails, as it occurred tragically in the Soviet Union.[13] Yet, contra his New Left critics' allegations, this does not imply that Adorno falls prey to a quietist stance of contemplation.[14] Rather, within a context where everything "threatens to turn out for the worst even if meant for the best"[15], for Adorno theory is "a form of praxis" which is "more akin to transformative praxis than a comportment that is compliant for the sake of praxis".[16] To reformulate the point more explicitly, what Adorno proposes is that theory abstains itself from giving direct instructions to political praxis[17] in order to intervene more effectively from a critical

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[10] Adorno, "Marginalia to Theory and Praxis", p. 269. See also ibid., p. 268: "Whoever does not make the transition to irrational and brutal violence sees himself forced into the vicinity of the reformist that for its part shares the guilt for perpetuating the deplorable totality". Elsewhere, Adorno also excludes "any appeal to form a left-wing socialist party […]. Such a party would either be dragged along in the wake of the Communist Party, or it would suffer the fate of the SPD or Labour Party. It is not a political issue that there is no party" (Adorno and Horkheimer, "Towards a New Manifesto?", p. 61).

[11] "The desperate state of affairs, that the praxis on which everything depends is thwarted, paradoxically affords thinking the breathing-space which it would practically be criminal not to use", (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 245, Redmond's translation used).

[12] Adorno, "Who's Afraid of the Ivory Tower?", p. 19.

[13] Adorno, "Marginalia to Theory and Praxis", p. 265. For Adorno's critique of the Soviet Union see Adorno and Horkheimer, "Towards a New Manifesto?", p. 59.

[14] While he condemns withdrawal from society for leaving unchanged the existing predicament (see Adorno, *Critical Models*, p. 4), Adorno equally discards a pure contemplative attitude as mere resignation before the overpowering totality (see Adorno, *Vermischte Schriften I*, p. 228).

[15] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 245.

[16] Adorno, "Resignation", p. 293.

[17] "In my writings, I have never offered a model for any kind of action or for some specific campaign. […] My thinking always has stood in a rather indirect relationship to praxis. My thinking has perhaps had practical consequences in that some of its motifs have entered consciousness, but I have never said anything that was immediately aimed at practical actions" (Adorno, "Who's Afraid of the Ivory Tower?", p. 15). See also Adorno, *Marginalia to Theory and Praxis*, p. 277.

angle "in the interest of practice itself"[18]. In this sense, by illustrating the mechanisms at the root of our subservience to the destructive logic of capitalist exchange, the aim of theory is to reveal the contradictions and instabilities in the social reality that are liable to an transformative intervention, thus generating the critical awareness necessary to prevent praxis from inadvertently supporting the *status quo*:

> The undiminished persistence of suffering, fear, and menace urges that […] thought […] must come to know, without any mitigation, why the world – which could be paradise here and now – can become hell itself tomorrow. […] It would be anachronistic to abolish [such knowledge] for the sake of a praxis that at this historical moment would inevitably eternalize precisely the present state of the world, the very critique of which is the concern of philosophy.[19]

Accordingly, the only way we can hope to solve the deadlock of a redemptive praxis that is urgently needed but, at the same time, must be put off for the foreseeable future is to engage in critical reflection as the preliminary step to acquire the political maturity radical social change demands. By political maturity Adorno refers to the capacity of distancing oneself and reflecting on one's thoughts and actions, which he expresses with the Nietzschean demand "not to be at home in one's home".[20] Such an attitude directly results from the new categorical imperative imposed by Auschwitz on human beings. So long as our systematically wrong society keeps in place the conditions that might lead to a catastrophic relapse into barbarism, in fact, critique is the best weapon left at our disposal to oppose its integrative pressures. That is the reason why the deconstruction of the perverse influence ideology exerts on individual

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[18] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 143.
[19] Adorno, "Why Still Philosophy", p. 14, translations amended.
[20] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 39.

consciousness assumes the utmost relevance, to the extent that Adorno goes as far as to state that

> the fault lies exclusively with ideology. Basically, we have to change consciousness, to dissolve the context of delusion in the minds of others.[21]

Undoubtedly, the operation of public enlightenment carried out by critical theory is unable by itself to transform the objective conditions of the social order. Yet, by providing the necessary insights "to distinguish between what is known and what is accepted merely by convention or under the constraint of authority", for Adorno critical theory can spark an immunizing sense of discomfort towards the current state of affairs, whose force results into resistance against "established opinions", "existing institutions", and "everything that is merely posited, that justifies itself with its existence".[22]

Now, the political nature of critique as a practice of resistance marks an undeniable consonance between Adorno and Foucault's projects. Like Adorno, Foucault is equally suspicious about reformism and existing theorizations of revolution. On the one hand, he warns us that "the necessity of reform mustn't be allowed to become a form of blackmail serving to limit, reduce, or halt the exercise of criticism"[23] and accuses programmatic politics of contributing to the stabilization of systems of power.[24] On the other, Foucault criticizes the standard discourses about revolution as a singular and teleological rupture for constituting "a gigantic effort to domesticate

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[21] Adorno and Horkheimer, "Towards a New Manifesto?", p. 61.
[22] Adorno, "Critique", pp. 281–82.
[23] Foucault, "Questions of Method", p. 236.
[24] Foucault, "La philosophie analytique de la politique", p. 547. While in his later years Foucault's position seems more nuanced, insofar as he favourably welcomes the alliance between the PCF and the Parti Socialiste in the 1981 French elections, this shift is due to his praise of the "logic of the Left" for with Mitterrand was elected (Foucault, "So Is It Important to Think?", p. 454) more than to his appreciation of their program.

the revolts within a rational and controllable history"[25], while contrasting the hostility Western masses have developed towards revolution in the second half of the 20th century by pointing to "the […] desirability for the picture of revolution" as the invention by the masses themselves of new relational modes between human beings.[26] Nevertheless, Foucault expresses all his doubts that the time for this different type of revolution has yet come. As a result, following in Adorno's footsteps, Foucault prefers to connect the possibility of a progressive politics to forms of resistance against the *dispositifs* of modern power as well as to the delineation of an immanent modality of critique capable of fostering radical transformation.[27] In this sense, Foucault concurs with Adorno that critique cannot represent the preliminary step of a prophetic-legislative argument, which intends to expose what has to be done from the perspective of a subject-spectator external to his own actuality.[28] Rather, although he eschews the moral vocabulary still characterizing Adorno's approach, Foucault thinks that the task of critical philosophy is to diagnose the strategic, ordinary use of power in the attempt to multiply and intensify the points of rupture and the fields of potential conflict. Certainly, by placing "on the same plane […] practices, institutions, and theories", Foucault avoids "the problem of the anteriority of theory with respect to practice, and the other way around".[29] Together with Deleuze, he upholds that the relationship between theory and practice is better understood if one describes it in terms of the notion of relay: "practice is a set of

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[25] Foucault, "Useless to Revolt?", p. 450.
[26] Foucault, "Le savoir comme crime", pp. 85–6, my translation.
[27] Foucault, "So Is It Important to Think?", pp. 456–57.
[28] "People have to build their own ethics, taking as a point of departure the historical analysis, sociological analysis, and so on that one can provide for them. I don't think that people who try to decipher the truth should have to provide ethical principles or practical advice at the same moment, in the same book and the same analysis. All this prescriptive network has to be elaborated and transformed by people themselves" (Foucault, "An Interview by Stephen Riggins", p. 132).
[29] Foucault, "Michel Foucault, «Les Mots et les Choses»", p. 526, my translation. In this sense, as Dardot has recently stressed, in Foucault "it's the problem of the relationship of theory in general to practice in general that is refused *qua* problem" (Dardot, "De la praxis au pratiques", p. 185).

relays from one theoretical point to another, and theory is a relay from one practice to another".[30] Notwithstanding these demarcations, however, Foucault shares with Adorno the idea that as a non-prescriptive point of view "theory does not express, translate or serve to apply practice: it is practice".[31] Refraining from giving praxis concrete directives, for Foucault theory is practical and political at the same time because it is not a detached representation of reality, but rather the product of a perpetual struggle within which the existing power institutions strives to turn the intellectual into their instrument and object, whereby theory "is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, […] the power which is to be seized".[32] Accordingly, theory figures as a strategic intervention geared to produce a Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* capable of making the dominant forms of subjec(tiva)tion intelligible and thus criticisable, which is to say liable to the interplay between freedom and *dispositifs* of seizure:

> It is true that my attitude isn't a result of the form of critique that claims to be a methodical examination in order to reject all possible solutions except for the one valid one. It is more of the order of "problematization" – which is to say, the development of a domain of acts, practices, and thoughts that seem to me to pose problems for politics.[33]

On Foucault's view, this means that philosophy should not supply models for politics, nor should politics address philosophy in search of a vindicatory account of its programmes. Rather, located at the margins of politics, philosophy should raise critical challenges for the latter through the formulation of "problems that are as *concrete* and *general* as possible", problems that question the current modes of

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[30] Foucault and Deleuze, "Intellectuals and Power", p. 206.
[31] Ibid., pp. 207–08.
[32] Foucault, *The Order of Discourse*, p. 110.
[33] Foucault, "Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations", p. 384.

domination by affecting the entire regime of social practices. Philosophy, in fact, "does not tell the truth of political action, it tells the truth in relation to political action".[34] As I have already pointed out at the end of Chapter 3 above, such a position implies a fallibilistic stance of modesty, which Foucault shares with Adorno. The latter goes even so far as to claim that

> To abstain from self-assertiveness […] seems […] to be the crucial thing to ask from individuals today. In […] a list of cardinal virtues, […] I could think of nothing except for modesty [*Bescheidenheit*]. Or to put it another way, we must have a conscience, but may not insist on our own.[35]

We must constantly remind ourselves of the impossibility of stepping outside our guilt context and living rightly. Given the moral precariousness of the present state of affairs, this means that we ought to show distrust towards those who claim to have found the incontrovertible key to right living, while at the same time protesting against the universalization of socially generated moral codes upon each and everyone.[36] Similarly, Foucault asserts:

> I take care not to dictate how things should be. I try instead to pose problems, to make them active, to display them in such a complexity that they can silence the prophets and lawgivers, all those who speak for others or to others.[37]

That should not come as a surprise if one considers the neat line of distinction

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[34] Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, p. 288. In other terms, the relationship between politics and philosophy must not be conceived as one of coincidence but one of co-existence, whereby it is essential for political rationality to maintain a correlation with philosophy as well as for philosophy to "test its reality in relation to a political practice" (ibid.).
[35] Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, pp. 169–70.
[36] Ibid., pp. 170–71.
[37] Foucault, "Interview with Michel Foucault", p. 288.

Foucault draws between the "universal" intellectual (epitomised by the left thinker) and his own figure as a "specific" intellectual, who employs the analytical categories deriving from its personal and "physical" involvement with the scrutinized reality to problematize "in their power of constraint, but also in the contingency of their historical formation, the systems of thought that have become familiar to us". In this respect, what takes shape in Foucault is a portrait of the public intellectual as engaged in a resistive practice of desubjection geared to "collaborate with practitioners" in their struggle "not only to modify the [existing] institutions and practices but to reshape the forms of thought".[38] For the purposes of my argument, however, it is in the 1978 lecture Foucault gives to the French Society of Philosophy that one can find the decisive account of the political quality of his conception of critique. Here Foucault portrays critique as "a political and moral attitude, a way of thinking", which defines "the art of not being governed *quite so much*".[39] Indeed, if modern power aims at subjugating individuals and populations alike through governmental technologies that lay claim to truth, critique can be described as

> the movement by which the subject gives himself the right to question truth on its effects of power and question power on its discourses of truth. Well, then!: critique will be the art of voluntary insubordination, that of reflected indocility.[40]

For Foucault, therefore, critique is a courageous act of disobedience that calls into question the limits beyond which the structures of power we have historically

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[38] Foucault, "What is Called 'Punishing'?", p. 384.
[39] Foucault, "What is Critique?", p. 45, emphasis added.
[40] Ibid., p. 47.

accepted become intolerable, seeking thereby to release us from our self-incurred immaturity.[41]

Nevertheless, if commentators have stressed the proximity Foucault himself notices between his approach and that of the Frankfurt School[42], here I think one should exert some more prudence, since that juxtaposition risks blurring the substantial differences that separate it from Adorno's perspective. In the attempt to show these differences, below I shall develop a detailed comparison of Adorno's minimal portrait of a life of resistance and Foucault's early conception of resistance as he elaborates it in his works of the first half of the 1970s.

As we have repeatedly seen, although he sometimes claims that "integration […] has not yet wholly succeeded"[43], Adorno holds that capitalist domination is at the root of the tendential transformation of our Western world into a gigantic prison where "all phenomena rigidify and become insignias of the absolute rule of that which is".[44] Consequently, reducing life to the "ideology of reification"[45], the all-pervasive social totality we inhabit cripples any possibility of right living. But if individuals cannot enjoy the autonomy required to live an upright life, Adorno believes there are still opportunities to exercise what Kant calls "negative freedom", namely the capacity to resist social determination.[46] Adorno puts the point thusly:

> The sole thing that can perhaps be said is that the right life today would consist in
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> resistance to the forms of wrong life that have been seen through and critically dissected

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[41] Ibid., p. 67.
[42] See Cook, "Adorno, Foucault and Critique", especially p. 12.
[43] Adorno, "Free Time", p. 175.
[44] Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society", p. 210, translation amended. Arguably, for Adorno, this is equally valid for the countries belonging to the former Eastern bloc: they are just extremely bureaucratized variants of their late modern Western counterparts, which are marked by the same subordination of individuals to society as a whole (see Adorno, *History and Freedom*, p. 5).
[45] Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society", p. 206.
[46] For a recent interpretation that wrongly accuses Adorno of precluding "any "perception of elements of resistance" see Rehmann, *Theories of Ideology*, p. 95.

by the most progressive minds. […] what I have in mind is the determinate negation of everything that has been seen through, and thus the ability to focus upon the power of resistance to all the things imposed on us, to everything the world has made of us, and intends to make of us to a vastly greater degree.[47]

In other terms, as a historical category, Adorno contends that (positive) freedom can be realized only in a right society.[48] The advent of such a society depends on the achievement of material "conditions of unfettered plenty"[49] and on humanity's conscious control of those conditions.[50] We know that, in Adorno's view, the first of these two requirements could be satisfied *hic et nunc*, because the current level of the forces of production would enable the universal satisfaction of human needs[51] and the abolition of suffering (at least in its senseless forms). However, Adorno also maintains that individuals remain beholden to the social totality as their second nature, thereby prolonging those very same mechanisms that surreptitiously sanction their unfreedom.[52] Hence, insofar as it is still possible, progress "calls for a critical confrontation with society"[53] capable of breaking its delusional spell and resisting blind subordination.[54] Such resistance takes the shape of "various strategies of self-

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[47] Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, pp. 167–68, translation amended.

[48] "It [individual freedom] necessarily presupposes the freedom of all, and cannot even be conceived as an isolated thing, that is, in the absence of social freedom. […] In short, anything we can call morality today merges into the question of the organization of the world" (Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, p. 176). On the debt Adorno owes to Hegel in regard to his historical and social conception of freedom see Dews, *The Idea of Evil*, especially p. 189.

[49] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 208.

[50] Adorno *History and Freedom*, p. 143.

[51] Pace Hegel and Marx, Adorno contends even more controversially that this level has been achieved much earlier in human history. See Adorno, *History and Freedom*, pp. 67–8.

[52] In Adorno's words, "there has been as much free will as people wanted to free themselves" (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 265).

[53] Adorno, *History and Freedom*, p. 150.

[54] Today, in fact, "freedom can be grasped in determinate negation only, in light of the concrete form of unfreedom. Positively it becomes an 'as if'" (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 231, translation amended). O'Connor is thus incorrect in speaking about "autonomy as resistance". See O'Connor, *Adorno*. For an analogous, erroneous interpretation of Adorno's idea of freedom as autonomy see Hammer, *Adorno and the Political*; Zuidervaart, *Social Philosophy after Adorno*; Berman, *Adorno's Politics*; and Giacchetti Ludovisi, *Adorno as Marx's Scholar*. Although sometimes she fails to clearly distinguish Adorno's notion of freedom from the concept of autonomy (see Cook, *Adorno on Nature*,

conscious non-cooperation"[55], by which individuals aim not only to avert the worst (paradigmatically the recurrence of Auschwitz and comparable genocidal threats) but also to extirpate all those conditions that are adverse to the potential realization of a right society. As Freyenhagen claims[56], that would include the eradication of great evils (such as murder, hunger, torture, and slavery), and more historically specific fights against violent manifestations of state repression, restrictions of civil liberties, and violations of the principle of *Rechtsstaatlichkeit* enshrined in constitutional democracies.[57] Adorno even championed the establishment of legal provisions geared to protect individuals from the arbitrary actions of ruling authorities (like the *habeas corpus*)[58], while at the same time pointing to the importance of the separation of executive, legislative, and judiciary powers for the constitution of a democratic "*system of checks and balances*".[59] But as an essential requirement and element of a life of resistance Adorno also includes solidarity with other people's suffering[60], whose manifestation represents the inverse of the ever-expanding bourgeois coldness. Primarily oriented towards physical suffering, such a feeling is the prerequisite for realizing the damage inflicted on our life and for being able to think the possibility of change itself. Still, for Adorno, today solidarity is too compromised to function as the

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passim), lately Cook is more careful on this point, acknowledging the link that, in Adorno's view, connects freedom with resistance (see, for instance, Cook, "Adorno, Foucault and critique", p. 13).

[55] Finlayson, "Adorno on the Ethical and the Ineffable", p. 6.

[56] See Freyenhagen, "Adorno's Ethics Without the Ineffable", § VI.

[57] To give just a few examples, in 1967 Adorno publicly supported the students' demands for a fair trial after the assassination of Benno Ohnesorg, a student protesting at a Berlin rally organized in response to the state visit of the Persian Shah, and expressed all his scorn for the subsequent acquittal of the police officer who had shot him (see Kraushaar, *Frankfurter Schule 2*, p. 324). Next year he condemned the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Union (see Adorno and Horkheimer, *Briefwechsel 1927–69*, pp. 647–50) and protested against the adoption by the German *Bundestag* of state emergency legislation [*Notstandgesetze*], whose dangerous limitation of basic rights recalled to his mind the articles of the Weimar Republic's constitution that had paved the way to the rise of the Nazi regime (see Adorno, *Vermischte Schriften I*, pp. 396–97).

[58] Adorno, *History and Freedom*, p. 140.

[59] Adorno, "Critique", p. 281, translation amended.

[60] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, pp. 203–04.

basis of an ethics of compassion geared to provide moral guidance to right living, whereby its exercise must always be informed by a fallibilistic attitude.[61]

To all this one should add another often-neglected factor of resistance Adorno suggests: the latter consists in the regeneration of a sense of active participation in a common praxis through the revival of the "true bonds that exist between the public dimension and the individual fate"[62], which represent the precondition for a democratic society as "a free and solidary collaboration under shared responsibility".[63] What shines through here is the dialectical relationship Adorno establishes between the oppositive resources of the individual subject and the supra-individual energies that are disclosed in resistance against the totally administered world. Clearly, Adorno is not so naïve to think that *qua* isolated individuals we can change social reality.[64] On his view, instead, the possibility of progress lies in the hands of the species as a whole, since humanity alone has the capacity to "finally transcend the self-preservation to which it was reduced by being restricted simply to a means"[65], thus achieving the goal it implicitly strives for – i.e. a reconciled condition that would guarantee its rational self-preservation. Despite his apparently nostalgic

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[61] Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, pp. 173–74. See also Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy*, pp. 171–73. Despite Freyenhagen's mostly convincing defence, however, it seems there is a certain tension in Adorno's account of compassion: on the one hand, he squarely refutes the idea that an ethics of compassion might provide guidance on right living. As he explains, "this is because the concept of compassion tacitly maintains and gives its sanction to the negative condition of powerlessness in which the object of our pity finds himself. The idea of compassion contains *nothing* about changing the circumstances that give rise to the need for it, but instead, as in Schopenhauer, these circumstances are absorbed into the moral doctrine and interpreted as its main foundation" (Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, p. 173, emphasis added). On the other, Adorno appeals to the moral addendum as the source of a bodily cognition of the wrongness of our social world. For him, then, solidarity with suffering bodies communicates to our cognitive structures the normative reasons motivating our practical intervention in view to negate or, at least, mitigate suffering, which clearly involves a minimal modification of the existing conditions. Although I cannot venture to analyse it here, Früchtl's distinction between narcissistic and real compassion (cited approvingly by Freyenhagen, see *Adorno's Practical Philosophy*, p. 132) seems to offer little help to solve this tension, since it inherits the normative problems we analysed in Chapter 4.
[62] Adorno, *Vermischte Schriften I*, p. 292, my translation.
[63] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 129, translation amended. See also Adorno, "Culture Industry Reconsidered", p. 106.
[64] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 203.
[65] Adorno, "Marginalia to Theory and Praxis", p. 273.

rhetoric, Adorno's recuperation of the Hegelian-Marxian notion of *Gattungswesen* does not refer to a prelapsarian, natural state of humanity but rather to an emancipatory potential, whose proleptic realization is the duty of what Adorno calls a global subject [*Gesamtsubjekt*].[66] The organisation of our social world, however, forecloses the emergence of a "human race that would possess the genuine control over its own destiny right down to the concrete details".[67] Adorno is thus sceptical of any attempt of existing forms of collective action to successfully engender transformation. Here the reference goes clearly to his ambiguous and tormented stance vis-à-vis Germany's 1960s student movement. Despite his often-overlooked solidarity with the progressive aims of the student movement itself[68], in fact, Adorno argues that in the non-revolutionary situation of late capitalism collective projects of political protest are destined to reify into blind pseudo-activity, i.e. "meaningless activity with a specious seriousness and significance"[69] grounded in a debasing attitude of conformism. As a mechanism of compensation for the weakness of the narcissistic ego before the overpowering totality of the capitalist machinery[70], Adorno even thinks that actionist groups verge on the edge of decisionistic authoritarianism: circles of self-elected leaders mould the consciousness of their followers with a view to immediate forms of gratification, while discouraging critical debate about ends in favour of questions of tactics as well as ready-made formulas of solidarity.[71] Accordingly, expressing a blind compulsion to positivity[72], actionism appears as a

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[66] See Adorno, "Progress", p. 144.
[67] Adorno, *History and Freedom*, p. 143.
[68] Adorno, "Late Capitalism or Industrial Society?", pp. 9–10. See also Kraushaar, *Frankfurter Schule 2*, p. 328–29.
[69] Adorno, "Veblen's Attack on Culture", p. 81.
[70] See Adorno, "Marginalia to Theory and Praxis", p. 275.
[71] Adorno, "Resignation", p. 291.
[72] Adorno, "Marginalia to Theory and Praxis", pp. 268–69. See also Adorno, "Who's Afraid of the Ivory Tower?", p. 19.

symptom of the "the fetishism of means"[73] proper to bourgeois instrumentalism, whereby it only threatens to perpetuate the ruling ideology and support the potential recurrence of fascist patterns of behaviour.[74] This leads Adorno to believe that individuals are far better placed today to carry out the task of removing those obstacles that prevent a truly global agent from appearing on the scene and fulfilling the demand for change.[75] To put it otherwise, whereas he argues that morally right living is obstructed because whatever we do embroils us in the badness of the existing state of affairs, Adorno thinks we should live as decently as we can[76], seeking to dissolve the subjective conditions at the root of the objective tendencies towards re-barbarisation:

> Since the possibility of changing the objective – namely societal and political – conditions is extremely limited today, attempts to work against the repetition of Auschwitz are necessarily restricted to the *subjective dimension*. By this I also mean essentially the psychology of people who do such things. […] One must come to know the mechanisms that render people capable of such deeds, must reveal these mechanisms to them, and strive, by awakening a general awareness of those mechanisms, to prevent people from becoming so again.[77]

More specifically, for Adorno, hope lies in the strength of the few remaining, bourgeois individuals who are still critical and self-critical enough to see through the

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[73] Adorno, "Marginalia to Theory and Praxis", p. 269.

[74] See Adorno, "Correspondence on the German Student Movement", Adorno to Marcuse 19/06/1969, p. 131.

[75] "In contrast to the collective powers, […] the universal and rational can hibernate better in the isolated individual than in the stronger battalions that have obediently surrendered the universality of reason", Adorno, "Individuum und Organisation", p. 455, my translation.

[76] Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, p. 167. See also Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy*, especially p. 91.

[77] Adorno, "Education After Auschwitz", pp. 192–93, emphasis added.

delusive character of the capitalist totality.[78] Although he fears that the ever-growing expansion of capitalism, the bureaucratic administration of life, and the disintegration of the old bourgeois family threaten the definitive disappearance of these individuals[79], Adorno insists that the antagonistic texture of late mass society leaves open the possibility to raise critical awareness of our negative experience, thereby fostering resistance against "a passive adhesion to [its] destructive mechanisms".[80] In this respect, Adorno's public engagement in radio broadcasts and television programs from the American years to the end of his life testifies to the decisive role he assigns to education as a vehicle to promote critical thought in individuals, including educators themselves.[81] On his view, stimulating a "debarbarising" attitude of non-cooperation and non-violent disobedience vis-à-vis society's deceitfulness and collectives' authority[82], education functions as "as a kind of vaccine" against those pathological processes of co-option "that are attuned exactly to those psychological dispositions we must assume are present in human beings"[83], whereby it describes the essential component of a new democratic leadership as democratic pedagogy geared to promote individuals' engagement in more substantive forms of democratic citizenship:

> Today perhaps more than ever, it is the function of democratic leadership to make the subjects of democracy, the people, *conscious of their own wants and needs as against the ideologies which are hammered into their heads by the innumerable communication of vested interests*. They must come to understand those tenets of democracy which, if violated, logically impede the exercise of their own rights and reduce them from self-

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[78] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 318.
[79] Ibid., pp. 135–36.
[80] Giacchetti Ludovisi, "Adorno as Marx's Scholar", p. 47.
[81] See Adorno, "The Meaning of Working Through the Past", p. 100.
[82] Adorno, *Erziehung zur Mündigkeit*, pp. 129–30 and pp. 144–46.
[83] Adorno, "The Meaning of Working Through the Past", p. 102.

determining subjects to objects of opaque political manoeuvres.[84]

Now, the bulk of the "ethics of resistance"[85] just sketched has gained much currency in the recent scholarship discussing Adorno's politics. The existing commentaries, however, lack a critical appraisal of its adequacy with respect to the objectives of Adorno's *own* theory.[86] In this sense, below I shall analyse what I regard as the most serious problems of Adorno's ethics of resistance, which risk impairing the emancipatory thrust of his project by depriving it of the theoretical and political mediations necessary to articulate the conditions for radical social change. To begin with, one cannot avoid stressing the fragile dependence of Adorno's ethics on his questionable doctrine of austere negativism, according to which the almost frictionless power of the biopolitical reification of life under late capitalism engulfs us in the wrongness of the existing context of delusion. This leads Adorno to assign priority to theory – especially to philosophy and autonomous art – as the sole medium we are left with capable of keeping open the possibility of revolutionary praxis through a reckless criticism of the badness of the current state of affairs. "Hope, wrested from reality by negating it, is the only form in which truth appears", Adorno writes.[87] Yet, although the determinate negation of the existing reality enables us to counter-factually derive the basic constraints society ought to satisfy in order to count as a reconciled one, the major goal of theory for Adorno remains that of supporting

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[84]Adorno, *Vermischte Schriften I*, p. 420. Confirming our suspicions about Adorno's elitist position emphasized in Chapter 4, Mariotti rightly points out the presence of two different registers in Adorno's discussion about democratic pedagogy, according to which a more egalitarian way of speaking *with* the people is opposed to the moralizing idea of speaking *to* them (this second tone is signalled by the use of the verb "make" in the passage just quoted). See Mariotti, "Adorno on Radio", especially p. 419.

[85] This phrase was first employed in Finlayson, "Adorno on the Ethical and the Ineffable". It has been adopted again in Hammer, *Adorno and the Political*, *passim* and more recently in Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy* (see chapter 6)

[86] For a partial exception see Zuidervaart, *Social Philosophy After Adorno*. Yet, on my reading, the way in which Zuidervaart formulates many of his criticisms reflects the presuppositions at the basis of his own project of a democratic theory of globalization (inspired especially by the work of Brunkhorst), which are incompatible with Adorno's negativism.

[87] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 98.

consciousness-raising and immunising activities against the integrative pressures of our totally administered society, whose defensive and reactive nature reflects itself in the practices of resistance he advocates. Without falling prey to abstract utopianism, sometimes Adorno seems to hint at a more constructive role for theory as contributing to the articulation of alternative forms of political praxis aimed at transformation *within* the social arrangement. Take, for instance, the following passage:

> The Archimedean point – how might a nonrepressive praxis be possible, how might one steer between the alternatives of spontaneity and organization – this point, if it exists at all, cannot be found other than through theory.[88]

But instead of elaborating on these brief remarks, Adorno insists that theory can at best unearth the contradictions that call for our intervention in order to avoid the definitive closure of the social totality upon itself, while showing all his inability to operate a break with the traditional conception of ideology as false consciousness when he appeals to a disclosure of people's real wants and needs.[89] Accordingly, Adorno relegates resistance to act of protest or preventive reform incapable of achieving a structural transformation of the current predicament, which leads him to exclude the possibility that change could occur as the result of the emergence of a counter-power from local struggles within the institutional structures, cultural practices, and modes of relationship marking the differentiated architecture of late modern society, whose reinforcing concatenation might eventually acquire hegemony

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[88] Adorno, "Marginalia to Theory and Praxis", p. 274. See also Adorno, "Critique", p. 291. To my knowledge, the only secondary text briefly dealing with this tension is Freyenhagen, "Adorno's Politics", p. 874. Nevertheless, Freyenhagen fails to note the shortcomings that derive from Adorno's preference for a Hegelian conception of theory.
[89] Again the passage on democratic leadership cited above is telling in this respect.

and bolster the transition from a pre-revolutionary situation to a revolutionary one.[90]

That leaves Adorno in a dubious position, where the only way to think about the imperative of reconciliation is to conceive of it in terms of a spontaneous, event-like rupture deprived of any organizational mediation. In defence of Adorno, one could adduce the following counter-argument: by living less wrongly, we nurture the hope that conditions will arise some day delineating a clearer path for revolutionary praxis. Yet, as long as our resistance is merely defensive and reactive, it seems to me that this hope is largely illusory. Given the ever-increasing power and resilience Adorno ascribes to capitalism, in fact, it is unlikely that "situations may arise today or tomorrow which […] restore the possibility for [revolutionary] practice".[91] But even assuming that these situations obtain, I can hardly see how my criticism would be invalidated, since their realization would still be spontaneous and unplanned. Put otherwise, since Adorno thinks that only a humanity *à venir* can discharge the currently over-demanding moral imperative of changing our condition of unfreedom, the standard principle of post-Kantian moral philosophy "ought implies can" entails that Adorno should have explained us how the materialization of this global subject can take shape from the few possibilities for collective political agency in the present. However, that is exactly what Adorno falls short of. In place of an exposition, for example, of how the failure of society to satisfy the material needs of its members might trigger collective interpretation of needs describing alternative narratives to late capitalism, Adorno disparages existing forms of collective action as "illusionary", "hopeless" and "self-righteous", while condemning students' rage for its tendential regression into violent manifestations of repressed drives of aggression that write off the allegedly authentic source of criticism, i.e. reflective theorising. Still, his

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[90] On this point see also Zuidervaart, *Social Philosophy after Adorno*, especially pp. 72–4.
[91] Letter by Adorno to Horkheimer (dated 31/01/1962), quoted in Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School*, p. 466.

argument is specious: not only does he gloss over the historical fact that there have been non-violent revolutions, but Adorno also neglects the role indignation can play in sparking those cross-border practices of solidarity that constitute one of the essential conditions for the development of the global subject he champions. What we are left with, therefore, is a residual notion of the subject[92]: the void left by the political failure of the proletariat, on which his entire conception of the mission of philosophy depends in spite of being hardly examined, is alternatively occupied either by the few remaining critical individuals whose capacity for resistance is dying out or by the *Gesamtsubjekt* of a future humanity, two concepts that seem to retain a very limited political effectiveness. Furthermore, notwithstanding its positive overtones – which makes it hardly compatible with Adorno's negativist approach –, by introducing the concept of a future humanity Adorno ends up aligning his philosophical enterprise with the humanist trend of Marxist thought, without properly clarifying how this notion is supposed to avoid the pitfalls of the dominant "ideology of Man".[93] But far more important for my argument, as the underlying subject of a mere counter-discourse against modernity's dark side, Adorno's notion of a not-yet-realized humanity describes the contrastive mirror image of the present condition of oppression, exploitation, and unfreedom under late capitalism, whereby its emancipatory force comes to be confined within the field of possibilities that is disclosed by the same governmental apparatuses of power Adorno hopes to provide a remedy for. In a nutshell, if the modern mechanisms of subjection to the structures of capitalist domination work by activating the faculties of the individual in a one-dimensional and disfiguring way, it seems that Adorno's negativism trims much of

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[92] Albeit she wrongly excludes possible elements of resistance, on this point see also Rose, *The Melancholy Science*, p. 142.

[93] Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, p. 59

"the force of protest"[94] of his ethics of resistance, whose defences risk soon being co-opted.

At this stage, one might wonder whether Foucault can supply us with better resources for resistance, which are missing in Adorno's account. In order to illustrate that this is actually the case, I shall start by stressing the asymmetry between Foucault's and Adorno's starting points. Whereas Adorno's micrological method studies a particular social or cultural phenomenon in the attempt to show the almost perfect adherence of social life to the all-pervasive but evanescent power of capitalist reification, by refusing this "fantastic phobia of power"[95] Foucault's analyses of the modern apparatuses and their rationalities move from the premise of an "immense and proliferating criticizability of things, institutions, practices, and discourses".[96] To state it differently, if since his genealogical studies on the disciplinary techniques of normation Foucault's goal is to decipher the political field to which the *dispositifs* under examination belong "in such a way that the lines of force and the lines of fragility come forth", that is because he thinks in a certain sense power "never functions"[97], its techniques of subjection being always internally confronted by resistances playing "the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations".[98] This means that there cannot be power relations without corresponding resistances. The latter must be thought of not as external to power relationships, but rather as their "limit, their underside, their counter-stroke, [as] that which responds to every advance of power by a movement of disengagement"[99], whereby they should be

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[94] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 17.
[95] Foucault, "The Masked Philosopher", pp. 324.
[96] Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, p. 6.
[97] Foucault, "Clarifications on the Question of Power", p. 258 and 261.
[98] Foucault, *History of Sexuality 1*, p. 95.
[99] Foucault, "Power and Strategies", p. 138.

used "as a chemical catalyst in order to bring to light power relations".[100] From a Foucauldian perspective, then, it would be more correct to characterize Adorno's picture of capitalist reification in terms of subjugation or obedience, since the progressive exhaustion of elements of resistance determines the simultaneous disappearance of power itself. Foucault puts the point in the following, counter-intuitive way:

> If there was no resistance, there would be no power relations. […] So resistance comes first, and resistance remains superior to the forces of the process; power relations are obliged to change with the resistance. So I think that *resistance* is the main word, *the key word,* in this dynamic.[101]

Conversely, though, Foucault also contends that resistance is prompted by power[102], describing strategic forms of opposition which must be "as inventive, mobile, and productive as power" itself.[103] Hence, contrary to what Kelly argues[104], whether a micro-struggle is resisting or not is a crucial question for power's hegemonic strategies. On Foucault's view, far from being simply accounted for within power mechanisms, micro-resistances are marked by a tactical behaviour, which guarantees the possibility to concatenate them strategically in a macro-level practice of contestation capable of sabotaging not only the power-knowledge deployments against which they strive but also their over-all strategic system of coordination.

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[100] Foucault, "The Subject and Power", p. 329, translation amended.

[101] Foucault, "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity", p. 167.

[102] "Resistance is not anterior to the power it opposes. It is coextensive with it and absolutely its contemporary", (Foucault, "The End of the Monarchy of Sex", p. 224). See also the following passage: "[…] resistances […] are all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised; resistance to power does not have to come from elsewhere to be real, nor is it inexorably frustrated through being the compatriot of power. It exists all the more by being in the same place as power; hence, like power, resistance is multiple and can be integrated in global strategies" (Foucault, "Power and Strategies", p. 142).

[103] Foucault, "The End of the Monarchy of Sex", p. 224, translation amended.

[104] Kelly, *The Political Philosophy of Michel Foucault*, pp. 110–11.

Accordingly, Foucault denies that a revolutionary change can be achieved "by a kind of radical rupture or by a sort of flight without return"[105], since "there is no single locus of great Refusal […] or pure law of the revolutionary".[106] This marks a noteworthy improvement with respect to Adorno's totalizing conception of the transition to a different social world. As we have just seen, for Adorno, the latter hangs upon the spontaneous emergence of a largely unspecified revolutionary praxis, through which humanity could finally liberate itself from capitalist domination. To the contrary, sceptical as he is towards anthropological universals, since the 1970s Foucault insists that radical change results not from the unmediated, exceptional shift from one epistemic configuration to another (as his early archaeological writings still suggest)[107], but rather from the strategic coalescence of a diffuse plurality of local practices of resistance inherent to power relations. In any case, Foucault believes that "more often one is dealing with mobile and transitory points of resistance […] furrowing across individuals, […] remoulding them, marking off irreducible regions in them, in their bodies and minds"[108], elements of dissensus whose local and specific character is linked to the lines of force marking a particular field.[109]

On my view, however, the most important distinction between Adorno's and Foucault's accounts, lies elsewhere, namely in the nature of the practices of resistance they seek to encourage. A good starting point to substantiate my claim is Foucault's

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[105] Foucault, "La philosophie analytique de la politique", p. 542, my translation.
[106] Foucault, *History of Sexuality 1*, pp. 95–6.
[107] For Foucault's own critique of his earlier positions see Foucault, "Structuralism and Post-structuralism", p. 449.
[108] Foucault, *History of Sexuality 1*, p. 96, translation amended.
[109] Although a detailed examination of her interpretation of Foucault's work would deserve a longer treatment, from these remarks it is already clear that Butler's a priori identification of resistance with a process of subversive resignification of the terms by which the interpellative operation of naming calls the subject into being not only reduces resistance to the discursive domain (in accordance with her conflation of power and language), but it also looses track of the historical specificity and inexhaustible heterogeneity that for Foucault always characterize modes of resistance (for Butler's account of performative resignification see, for instance, Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, pp. 83–105 and Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, pp. 223–42).

discussion of resistance against biopower in *The Will to Knowledge*. Seeking to individuate the potential lines of tension in the political field constituted around the modern *dispositif* of sexuality, Foucault makes two largely underdeveloped but telling suggestions: on the one hand, life itself as the source of resistance for every force that tries to disengage itself from the grip of biopower[110]; on the other, the often cited reference to "bodies, pleasures, and knowledges". As he writes,

> we must not think that by saying yes to sex, one says no to power; on the contrary, one tracks along the course laid out by the general deployment of sexuality. It is the agency of sex that we must break away from, if we aim – through a tactical reversal of the various mechanisms of sexuality – to counter the grips of power with the claims of bodies, pleasures, and knowledges, in their multiplicity and their possibility of resistance. The point of support [*point d'appui*] for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasures.[111]

Notwithstanding their gestural character, I think these remarks provide us with an insight into what is at stake when Foucault speaks of resistance. If one keeps in mind the first lecture of his 1976 Collège de France course, the reference to "knowledges" in the passage just quoted is fairly uncontroversial. It designates all those "subjugated knowledges", whose return for Foucault accompanies the critical movements

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[110] "Against this power that was still new in the nineteenth century [i.e. biopower], the forces that resisted relied for support on the very thing it invested, that is, on life and man as a living being. […] Whether or not it was Utopia that was wanted is of little importance; what we have seen has been a very real process of struggle; life as a political object was in a sense taken at face value and turned back against the system that was bent on controlling it" (Foucault, *History of Sexuality 1*, pp. 144–45). Earlier on in the same text, Foucault writes: "one would have to speak of bio-power to designate what brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life. It is not that life has been totally integrated into techniques that govern and administer it; it constantly escapes them" (Ibid., p. 143). These excerpts of *The Will to Knowledge* are the major points of reference for all those who have tried to conceptualize "affirmative" biopolitics as a new political paradigm. See, for instance, Deleuze, "Desire and Pleasure" as well as Negri and Hardt, *Empire*. As I go on to contend in the main text, I believe that here Foucault is rather pointing out the emergence of a specific field of struggle against that peculiar form of modern domination represented by biopower.

[111] Foucault, *History of Sexuality 1*, p. 157.

emerged in the 1960s. By this phrase, Foucault means those historical contents that "have been buried or masked in […] formal systematizations" and that critique helps bring to light[112] as well as those knowledges that have been disqualified as "nonconceptual knowledges" or "hierarchically inferior knowledges", like those of the psychiatrized, the patient, or the delinquent. All these knowledges, for Foucault, add up to a historical knowledge of struggles, which genealogy contributes to unearth thus making it available for current fights.[113] As far as bodies and pleasures are concerned, instead, the discussion is much more complicated. Far from re-introducing a romantic, vitalistic conception of the body as the transcendental ground of transgression[114], it seems to me that here Foucault is rather hinting at possible ways of altering the political economy of lived bodies within the regime of aspectival captivity defined by modern biopower. Whereas the latter constitutes the horizon of intelligibility of the "natural body" targeted by governmental power, Foucault can be read as claiming that there is always a creative excess of the historical and cultural modes in which the lived body can be deployed against what it has been reduced to by the managerial and normalizing force of power techniques. That is the reason why Foucault's genealogical analysis comes to advocate pleasures as a potential corrective against of the sex-desire couple at the basis of the modern *dispositif* of sexuality. Indeed, while his genealogical inquiries show how this couple has been fabricated by the modern biopower with the aid, especially, of the practices of confession inherited from the Christian pastorate, Foucault regards pleasures as relatively less regulated

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[112] In this respect, for instance, Foucault claims that a semiology of the life in the asylum and a sociology of delinquence hinder an effective criticism of the disciplinary apparatuses of the asylum and the prison, like the one he mounts in *History of Madness* and *Discipline and Punish*.

[113] Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, pp. 7–8.

[114] See, for instance, Deleuze, *Foucault*, p. 92.

manifestations of the human experience[115], which might provide the basis for the experimental construction of new realities and discourses capable of displacing the limits constraining our own freedom:

> Pleasure also must be a part of our culture. […] for centuries people generally, as well as […] liberation movements, have always spoken about desire, and never about pleasure. "We have to liberate our desire", they say. *No!* We have to create new pleasure. And then maybe desire will follow.[116]

Foucault's appeal to pleasures is far from being incontestable. Still, my interest here is to show that since his early genealogical period Foucault conceptualizes resistance as a critical practice whose effectiveness depends upon its ability to thwart our condition of aspectival captivity through the creation of new cultural forms, relational modalities, and styles of existence irreducible to the prevailing social order of identifications. As Foucault sharply puts it, this means that

> *the problem is not changing people's consciousnesses – or what's in their heads – but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth*. It's not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power […] but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time. The political question, to sum up, is not error, illusion, alienated consciousness or ideology; it is truth itself.[117]

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[115] As Foucault argues, the word "pleasure" is "almost devoid of meaning. There is […] no 'abnormal' pleasure. It is an event […] on the edge of the subject, within something that is neither body nor soul, in short a notion which is neither ascribed nor ascribable" (Foucault, 1978 interview quoted in Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault*, p. 365).

[116] Foucault, "Sex, Power, and The Politics of Identity", p. 166.

[117] Foucault, "Truth and Power", p. 133, emphasis added.

In other terms, because "power is […] an […] ill-coordinated […] cluster of relations"[118] that does not coincide with society as a whole, for Foucault its deployments generate political fields in which spaces of resistance can materialize, thereby unintentionally breeding what tries to take advantage of power's own inconsistencies to break up its domination.[119] Unlike Adorno, though, Foucault seems to argue that resistance cannot be limited to reactive practices of negation, subtraction, and mitigation of our participation in the wrongness of our social world. Rather, resistance should take the shape of a proactive and strategic attack against the rationality governing the current regime of power-knowledge, an attack aimed at the invention of alternative modes in which power relations can be actualized. Nevertheless, one must acknowledge that Foucault's early analytics of power does not have sufficiently sharp theoretical tools to provide an adequate account of such a creative dimension of resistance: the negative declination of power in terms of war-like relations, in fact, prevents Foucault from drawing fine-grained distinctions not only between the several configurations power itself can assume, but also between the corresponding types of resistance, which by confronting power directly come to be reduced to a mode of dialectical struggle whose agenda risks being pre-determined by the ruling apparatuses.[120] The progressive awareness of these weaknesses leads the late Foucault to change the general logic of his inquiries in the attempt to reconceptualise the critical force of resistance. It is to the exploration of the theoretical and political consequences of this shift that the next section will be devoted.

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[118] Foucault, "The Confession of the Flesh", p. 199.

[119] In this respect, I believe that Žižek is utterly misguided when he claims that from the "absolute inherence of resistance to Power, Foucault seems to draw the conclusion that resistance is co-opted in advance, that it cannot seriously undermine the system" (Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, p. 256).

[120] Recognizing the shortcomings of his previous approach, in 1977 Foucault writes: "if one wants to take seriously the assertion that struggle is the core of relations of power, one must take into account the fact that the good old 'logic' of contradiction is no longer sufficient, far from it, for the unravelling of actual processes" (Foucault, "The Eye of Power", p. 164).

2. Foucault's Politics of the Governed

As we have seen in Chapter 2, since 1978 Foucault rejects his previous war-like model of power in favour of a redefinition of it in terms of government. Yet, this does not mean that the late Foucault opts for a tranquillizing conception of power. On the contrary, I shall show below that the introduction of the notion of government constitutes the basis for a remarkable modification in Foucault's idea of resistance, which "marks the return to the pure multiplicity of battle, out of any revolutionary teleology" and the potentially "sterilising constraints of the dialectic".[121] To this end, it is important to keep in mind the theoretical project associated with Foucault's genealogical study of the history of governmentality, according to which his earlier, almost exclusive focus on techniques of domination is complemented with an account of their interaction with self-technologies. Whereas in Chapter 2 I examined the dangerous integration of technologies of the self within the techniques of domination characterizing modern systems of power, in fact, this section will be mainly devoted to the investigation of the emancipatory potential Foucault ascribes to self-technologies as strategic means to devise possible modes of subjectivation capable of thwarting the identificatory mechanisms through which the contemporary art of governing seeks to conduct our conduct. As Foucault puts it in one of his last interviews,

> I believe […] that the subject is constituted through practices of subjection, or, in a more
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> autonomous way, through practices of liberation, of liberty.[122]

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[121] Senellart, "Michel Foucault: 'governamentalità' e ragion di Stato", p. 16, my translation. See also Foucault, "Power and Strategies", p. 144.

[122] Foucault, "An Aesthetics of Existence", p. 50. Although, as I hope I have illustrated above, one must distinguish neatly these three concepts (autonomy, liberation, freedom), I think that here Foucault employs them in a very loose way, the main objective being that of emphasising their contrast with heteronomous practices of subjection.

My argument finds a good starting point in *Security, Territory, Population*, where Foucault elaborates the notion of "counter-conduct" as a first attempt at reformulating the conceptual couple of power and resistance. By this notion Foucault designates "specific revolts of conduct" [123], which appeared in correlation with the individualizing and totalizing forms of control exercised by the Christian pastorate during the Middle Ages. On his view, three elements are constitutive of these movements of resistance: (1) their appeal "to be led differently" – according to a different mode of conduction than the one imposed by the dominant regime of government; (2) their attempt to "define the way for each to conduct himself"[124]; (3) their tactical immanence within the existing regime of power. As far as the last feature is concerned, counter-conducts utilize "tactical elements that are pertinent in the anti-pastoral struggle to the very extent that they fall within, in a marginal way, the general horizon of Christianity".[125] However, Foucault warns us that the absolute inherence of counter-conducts to the political field defined by pastoral power should not lead us to regard them as purely reactive acts of contraposition. Rather, if Foucault opts for the new term "counter-conduct" excluding other notions like disobedience, insubordination, and misconduct, it is because he wishes to stress not only its positive and productive nature, but also its political and ethical character. A brief example might help to illustrate what Foucault seeks to convey. Take, for instance, his discussion of asceticism as a practice of counter-conduct. In contrast to the commonly accepted view, Foucault holds that "asceticism is […] a sort of […] element of reversal by which certain themes of Christian theology or religious experience" are employed against the structures of pastoral power.[126] Whereas the

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[123] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 194.
[124] Ibid., pp. 194–95.
[125] Ibid., p. 215.
[126] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 207.

pastorate demands permanent obedience and renunciation of the will, as a laborious exercise of the self upon the self asceticism represents "a sort of exasperated and reversed obedience that has become egoistic self-mastery".[127] Asceticism aims at an ethical condition of perfect mastery of oneself "that is much closer to the Greek *apatheia* […] than to the Christian *apatheia*, part of pastoral power, which requires the continual renunciation of [one's] will".[128] Finally, asceticism "escapes pastoral power by definition"[129], since it replaces the techniques of confession and examination at the basis of pastoral obedience with a mystical quest for union with God. More generally, pointing to the link between spiritual movements and popular struggles, Foucault maintains that the objective of counter-conducts is "a different form of conduct", motivated by the will to conduct oneself or "to be conducted differently, by other leaders [*conducteurs*] and other shepherds, towards other objectives and forms of salvation, and through other procedures and methods".[130] Foucault's emphasis on alterity is crucial: his notion of counter-conduct describes an unsettling act of desubjection geared to modify the hierarchical but unstable relations of power that constitute the structure of government as an agonistic tension between the three dimensions Foucault detects in the notion of conduct, i.e. conducing someone, letting oneself be conducted [*se laisser conduire*], and conducting oneself.[131] The concept of counter-conduct, therefore, implies a governmental pole that seeks to determine the possible field of action of individuals and, on the other hand, the individual or collective refusal to be governed thusly, by these instances of power, at this price, namely individuals' strategic freedom to conduct themselves (or let themselves be conducted) otherwise:

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[127] Ibid., pp. 207–08.
[128] Davidson, "In Praise of Counter-Conduct", p. 30.
[129] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 212, translation amended.
[130] Ibid., pp. 194–95.
[131] Ibid., p. 193.

The crucial problem of power is not that of voluntary servitude (how could we seek to be slaves?). At the very heart of the power relationship, and constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom.[132]

Foucault uses the term "counter-conduct" almost exclusively to describe the configuration of anti-pastoral struggles in the Middle Ages, while the concept no longer reappears in Foucault's subsequent work. [133] Notwithstanding this abandonment, however, my claim is that Foucault does preserve its conceptual framework as a useful tool for the analysis of contemporary practices of resistance. This is made clear already in a 1980 interview, where Foucault argues that today "we are perhaps at the beginning of a great crisis of reevaluation of the problem of government" marked by the emergence of struggles "over questions of everyday life as well as great decisions".[134] These resistances can be grasped in terms of the distinction between "processes of liberation" on the one hand and "practices of

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[132] Foucault, "The Subject and Power", p. 342.

[133] The reasons for this absence may be multifarious: Foucault might have considered the notion of counter-conduct still too negative, whereby its force can be easily reabsorbed into the mesh of power. Conversely, Foucault might have feared that it could give rise to an erroneous interpretation of power and resistance as two heterogeneous substances, while in reality they are two poles of the same relationship. Or, as some passages allow presuming, Foucault might have thought that the development of counter-conducts is still internal to the workings of governmental *dispositifs*: it is in this sense, for example, that Foucault reads the reform movements of the 15th and 16th century, which are oriented to the construction of a new Christian pastorate (see Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 231). Speaking more broadly, what seems to have been lacking so far for Foucault is a true anti-pastoral revolt, which would be capable of calling into question the individualizing and totalizing rationality at the basis of the modern arts of government through the delineation of radically alternative forms of conduction ("There have been anti-feudal revolutions; there has never been an anti-pastoral revolution", Ibid., p. 150).

[134] Foucault, "Interview with Michel Foucault", pp. 295–96. Significantly, Foucault adds that, "in the history of the West, one can find a period similar to ours […]: I mean the end of the Middle Ages. From the fifteenth to the sixteenth century, there was a whole reorganization of the government of men […]. All that was a kind of reworking of the way in which people were governed in their individual, social, and political relations. It seems to me that we are again experiencing a crisis of government. The set of methods by which some people lead others is being challenged, if not of course by those who lead, who govern, even though they cannot help but take note of the difficulties" (Ibid.). In this regard, Foucault holds the youth movement of 1968 expressed the "deep malaise [for] The way in which power was exercised – not just state power but the power exercised by other institutions and forms of constraint, a sort of abiding oppression in everyday life. […] People no longer accepted being governed in the broad sense of government" (Ibid., p. 283).

freedom" on the other.[135] Although he remains quite sceptical towards the former –

since they run the risk of falling back to the idea that there is a generic human nature

which has been alienated and must be rediscovered –, Foucault recognizes that these

processes might play a decisive function in the eradication of hierarchically

congealed states of domination, as it is testified for instance by the decolonization

movements between the 1940s and the 1970s. Still, on his view, processes of

liberation are not sufficient to define the nature of the practices of freedom prevalent

in contemporary societies from the 1960s onwards. Clearly demarcated from

struggles against ethnic, social or religious domination and economic exploitation,

these practices find their hallmark in the "struggle against subjection

[*assujettissement*], against forms of subjectivity and submission", which – albeit not

entirely novel – has come to the foreground in various social phenomena, like the

gay/queer movements, anti-psychiatry, prison oppositions, and feminists movements.

According to Foucault, all these practices share some important features in common,

among which the most important is that they

> revolve around the question: Who are we? They are a refusal of these abstractions, of
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> economic and ideological state violence, which ignore who we are individually, and also
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> a refusal of a scientific or administrative inquisition that determines who one is. To sum
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> up, the main objective of these struggles is to attack not so much such-or-such institution
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> of power, or group, or elite, or class but, rather, a technique, a form of power.[136]

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[135] Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom", pp. 282–83.
[136] Foucault, "The Subject and Power", p. 331. The other features Foucault mentions are the following: (1) they are transversal in the sense that they are not restricted to a single country, nor to a particular form of political or economic regime; (2) their target are the effects of power as such, whereby, for example, medical practice is denounced not because it would conceal economic interests, but rather because it exercises an unrestrained power over individuals; (3) they are immediate, looking for instances of power that are closest to them, and they discredit future solutions to their problems; (4) they question the status of the individual by asserting the right to be different and attacking what isolates the individual in his forced identity; (5) they oppose the effects of power linked to the existing regime of knowledge, as well as secrecy, deformation, and mystifying representations.

For Foucault, therefore, these practices of freedom are not so much "for or against the 'individual'" as against the mechanisms of subjection and the "government of individualization"[137] that marks modern state power:

> The political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the state, […] but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualization linked to the state.[138]

As Foucault puts it elsewhere, if liberation is still possible today, it can "come only from attacking […] political rationality's very root", ", namely the regime of truth at the basis of the governmental apparatuses of modern power. Consequently, far from confining it to the demands for legal recognition – which risk being eventually co-opted within the power's strategy –, Foucault holds that the target of effective resistance "is not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are".[139] In other terms, what Foucault seems to encourage resistance against is power's individualizing and identificatory ambitions, thus urging a radical re-shaping of our own subjectivity:

> We have to promote *new forms of subjectivity* through the *refusal* of this kind of individuality that has been imposed on us for several centuries.[140]

But let's pause for a moment and examine how Foucault here seeks to demarcate his position from the Frankfurt School on the background of Marx's phrase that "man

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[137] Ibid., p. 330.
[138] Ibid., p. 336.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid., emphasis added. In this sense, I think one should be rather doubtful about those forms of identity politics that allegedly find in Foucault's philosophy a theoretical back-up of their fight for the valorisation of subjugated and marginalized identities. Indeed, such forms of struggle "for" an individual tied to a specific identity leave the individualizing logic of subjection unchallenged, thus unwittingly reinforcing extant power relations.

produces man". Discussing this phrase in his interview with Trombadori, Foucault deplores the Frankfurt School for interpreting it in terms of the liberation of "our imprisoned nature" or the discovery of "our fundamental truth", since all these notions presuppose a traditional and philosophical conception of the subject. Foucault, instead, argues that "what ought to be produced is not man as nature supposedly designed him, or as his essence ordains him to be", but rather that "we need to produce something that doesn't exist yet, without being able to know what will be". A little further he adds:

> As for the word "produce", I don't agree with those who would assume that this production of man by man occurs like the production of value, the production of wealth or of an economically useful object; it's the destruction of what we are as well as the creation of a completely different thing, a total innovation.[141]

To state it differently, for Foucault, the production of man by man is the creation of a new subjectivity rather than the recuperation of an alienated original essence, which only threatens to undermine the novelty of production itself. Now, this reading of the Frankfurt School is surely oversimplified. As far as Adorno is concerned, the nostalgic sense of lament associated with his vocabulary of "deformation" or "distortion" should be understood as pointing not to an authentic essence of the human being that has been lost but rather to a presently unknown potential, whose fulfilment hangs upon the realization of a totally different state of affairs. However, if read within the context of his critique of humanism, it seems to me that Foucault's objections are not completely off the mark. Although the notion of species being is "a

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[141] Foucault, "Interview with Michel Foucault", p. 275.

result, not an εἶδος"[142], in fact, for Adorno utopian change results from the emergence of a human race capable of regaining control over the products of its own praxis, whereby it seems that his thought remains tied to the humanist framework marking the early Marx's depiction of universal emancipation as the restoration [*Zurückführung*] of all relations under the rational aegis of man.[143] But to my eyes, there is a second aspect that makes Foucault's annotations partially cogent, namely Adorno's conception of what a right society would entail. To reformulate a previous point, despite his rejection of positive conceptions of human essence, Adorno turns the compensatory satisfaction of our primordial wish for unity with nature into the ultimate standard to judge the quality of a truly redemptive reconciliation, thereby imposing a strong constraint on the proleptic forms the subject can take. Disavowing even this last highly speculative requirement, instead, Foucault insists on the radical openness of the change fostered by practices of freedom, whose notion marks a break both with his previous dual model of power and resistance and with his early insufficient characterization of the latter as a reactive counter-power. Indeed, finally putting the dialectical circle between power and counter-power out of balance[144], resistance no longer takes the shape of a direct struggle against power strategy, but it rather comes to describe "the way in which individuals, in their struggles, in their confrontations, in their projects, freely constitute themselves as subjects of their

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[142] Adorno, "Subject and Object", p. 150.

[143] As a further confirmation, in *Dialectics of Enlightenment* one can read: "Critical thought, which does not call a halt before progress itself, requires us to take up the cause […] of tendencies towards real humanity, even though they seem powerless towards in the face of the great historical trend" (Ibid., p. xi).

[144] On this point I strongly disagree with Lemke, who misleadingly points to a re-evaluation of the dialectics in Foucault's later works (see, Lemke, *Eine Kritik der politischen Vernunft*, note 54, p. 308). At least from 1968 onwards, Foucault's permanent concern about distinguishing his stance from official Marxism – through the rejection of both its identification of resistive phenomena in terms of class struggle and its idea of intervention as a mere substitution of the existing power by a different one – clearly points in the opposite direction. Indeed, as I go on to argue in the main text, his late ascription of a creative force to resistance is exactly the way Foucault chooses to *definitively* overcome the dialectical conception of power relations that still marks orthodox Marxist theories (for an similar remark, albeit vitiated by vitalistic overtones, see Revel, *Michel Foucault, un'ontologia dell'attualità*, p. 131).

practices"[145], thus fashioning "new forms of life […] in society, art, culture, and so on through [their] sexual, ethical, and political choices".[146]

Again, Foucault's discussion of gay culture might serve as an illustration. On his view, the question of homosexuality should not be oriented to the definition of one's true sexual identity, whose liberation would hang upon the suspension of the repressive regime of heterosexuality. Rather, the problem of homosexuality relates to what Foucault himself calls "friendship", namely the local experimentation of unprecedented associations between human beings.[147] In the case of gay movements, Foucault argues that one witnesses the emergence of new types of relationships characterized by the existential sharing of one's time, environment, things, emotions, knowledge, and intimate confidences with lovers and friends through the modulation of the affective forces of love and pleasures, which shape an ambivalent and dynamic togetherness that erodes the boundaries of clearly defined identities.[148] It is precisely the unstable, open, and metamorphic nature of these relationships, in fact, that grants the gay mode of subjectivation its subversive, "disturbing" potential "much more than the sexual act itself". By introducing "love where there should be law, rule, and habit", the experimental practices of gay friendship create unpredictable and transformative styles of existence that "short-circuit" any governmental pretension to predict and channel them within institutionalized models of sexual conduct.[149] Take, for instance, what Foucault states with regard to gay sadomasochism:

I don't think that this movement of sexual practices has anything to do with the

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[145] Foucault, "Interview with *Actes*", p. 399.
[146] Foucault, "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity", p. 164, text amended.
[147] See Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life", pp. 135–36. See also Foucault, "The Social Triumph of the Sexual Will", pp. 159–60.
[148] See Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life", p. 136. See also Foucault, "The Gay Science", pp. 389–90.
[149] Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life", p. 136–37.

disclosure […] of S&M tendencies deep within our unconscious […] I think that S&M is much more than that; it's the real creation of new possibilities of pleasure, which people had no idea about previously. The idea that S&M is related to a deep violence […] is stupid. We know very well what all those people are doing is not aggressive; they are inventing new possibilities of pleasure with strange parts of their body – through the eroticization of the body. I think it's a kind of creation, a creative enterprise, which has as one of its main features what I call the desexualisation of pleasure.[150]

In other terms, S&M practices displace the normal, privileged connections between pleasure and bodily parts as they have been codified in the image of the reproductive organism promoted by modern biopower, thereby opening up the space for new affective potentialities. Undoubtedly, there are biographical motives that drew Foucault to recognize a stronger emancipatory potential in homosexual relationships, to which one should add the fact that at his time the normalization of heterosexual behaviour was surely more robust. Still, it is important here to get Foucault's argument right. For him, the choice of a gay mode of life is not an exclusive prerogative of those who have intercourses with people of the same sex. Rather, he explicitly declares that the affective relationships entailed in gay friendship "are, up to a certain point, transposable to heterosexuals"[151] themselves. In this sense, one can claim that Foucault "queerizes" the concept of "gay/homosexual", elaborating a version of counter-conduct that eludes the dichotomy between the heteronormative poles of heterosexuality and homosexuality.[152] As he sees it, the regime of veridiction of sexuality seeks to regulate and predetermine the possible field of action of individuals by soliciting the confessional identification of their "authentic self" and by redirecting their self-technologies to the incorporation of individualizing and

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[150] Foucault, "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity", p. 165.
[151] Foucault, "The Social Triumph of the Sexual Will", p. 160.
[152] On this point see also Siisiäinen, "Foucault and the Gay Counter-Conduct", especially p. 310.

totalizing norms of conduct. However, the technico-productive "sensualisation of power"[153] associated with these procedures stimulates the emergence of a dangerous series of affective deliverances, erotic pleasures, bodily forces, and intense sensations, whose flows threaten to wrong-foot the smooth functioning of governmental power through the formation of a counter-conductive mode of subjectivation capable of disrupting the discursive and institutional mechanisms at the basis of the depoliticizing science of sexuality.[154]

The introduction of the thematic of government, therefore, enables Foucault to redefine resistance in term of a transformative conduct that individuals put in place voluntarily and courageously against the governmental techniques of power responsible for their subjection. The will at the root of this resistance, though, should not be understood according to the traditional, philosophical concept of the will: Foucault's still largely neglected notion of the will stands neither for a metaphysical concept nor for the juridical *fictio* of the modern social contract theories, but rather for a *strategic* force which shapes the space of freedom within a specific power struggle, i.e. the very same space that – as we shall see below – Foucault calls "ethics".[155] Before examining the developments of Foucault's notion of resistance in his late ethical reflections, however, I believe it is worthwhile to briefly inquire into

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[153] Foucault, *History of Sexuality 1*, pp. 44–5.

[154] Foucault, for instance, analyses the case of the hermaphrodite Herculine Barbin, whose non-identical and ambivalent body paradoxically finds favourable conditions of emergence in the exclusively feminine and strongly religious milieu of Barbin's upbringing, which should have guaranteed her/his normalization (see Foucault, "Le vrai sexe"). Elsewhere, he makes reference to the army, "where love between men is ceaselessly provoked [*appelé*] and shamed" (Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life", p. 137). Other examples can be found in Foucault's discussion of hysteria as a form of resistance against psychiatric power (see Foucault, *Psychiatric Power*, especially pp. 253–54) and of convulsion as a revolt against pastoral power (see Foucault, *Abnormal*, especially pp. 213 and 222).

[155] "Those who try to control, determine, and limit the freedom of others are themselves free individuals who have at their disposal certain instruments they can use to govern others. Thus, the basis for all this is freedom, the relationship of the self to itself and the relationship to the other. The concept of government makes it possible to bring out the freedom of the subject and its relationship to others – which constitutes the very stuff [*matière*] of ethics" (Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom", p. 300, text amended) See also Lorenzini, "Foucault, la contro-condotta e l'atteggiamento critico", p. 146.

the reasons why after his 1978–79 course on liberalism and neoliberalism Foucault abandons his properly political archaeo-genealogies. In particular, far from seeing liberalism as the unsurpassable configuration of politics that would open up the non-political dimension of ethics, I shall show that – as the form practices of freedom take when infused by reflection[156] – for Foucault ethics represents the only means for *political* resistance against the liberal and neoliberal governmental technologies.

One of the most striking features of *The Birth of Biopolitics* is the absence of any examination of the political dynamics that take form around the deployments marking the liberal and neoliberal arts of government. As we have seen in Chapter 2, their political rationality manifests itself in the production and regulation of a social environment where every individual citizen can freely pursue his own interests shaping his life in multiple and different ways. From a prima facie reading of Foucault's lectures, then, one might get the impression that liberalism withdraws from demanding any specific mode of subjectivation, while assimilating all possible elements of contestation. Politics would thus be reduced to the correct, integrative management of the various social spheres, in which the existence of alternative conducts figures as its very condition of validity.[157] A similar discourse can be made for neoliberalism. Within the spaces of freedom granted by latter, individuals and collectives would be allowed to cultivate their different practices of ethical subjectivation without the latter constituting any obstacle for the effective exercise of government. These practices would end up representing just as many relays for "the optimization of systems of difference"[158] at the basis of the dominant governmental logic, i.e. for the unlimited inclusion of every form of conduct (even minority ones)

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[156] Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom", p. 284.

[157] For a similar remark see Karsenti, "La politica del «fuori»", pp. 88–9. Nonetheless, Karsenti does not agree with this interpretation, but rather thinks that Foucault's aim remains always that of identifying potential points of resistance to power.

[158] Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 259.

into the social environment through the creation of new markets. To put it briefly, (neo)liberalism would represent the ultimate horizon of politics, whose dynamics would leave the way clear for the development of the non-political dimension of ethics. Now, it is my contention that the reading just sketched is the result of the kind of approach Foucault opts for, which moves from (neo)liberalism's own self-understanding. The choice of this point of departure, in fact, renders unintelligible any counter-conductive movement: the subversive potentials of conduct are neutralized by the economic regime of veridiction of (neo)liberalism, according to which conduct itself is reduced to a scientific notion deprived of political valence.[159] This generates a distinctive ambiguity in Foucault's argument, which has been regarded even as the symptom of a supposed sympathy of the late Foucault for neoliberal positions.[160] But such ambiguity falls away once one takes into account the general perspective of Foucault's investigations. To begin with, contrary to the above interpretation, Foucault maintains that the liberal and neoliberal arts of government *do* impose determined modalities of subjectivation: their techniques converge in the production of the *homo oeconomicus* "as someone manageable, someone who responds systematically to systematic modifications artificially introduced into the [social] environment".[161] This means that individuals are called to manufacture themselves as fit and independent economic-rational subjects, whose free venture – carried out on the basis of a calculation of costs and benefits – is constantly assured through the intervention of the liberal and neoliberal apparatuses of security in a risky social environment such as the one of economic interests and market competition. The freedom at issue, however, must be sharply distinguished from Foucault's notion

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[159] Davidson, "In Praise of Counter-Conduct", p. 37.
[160] See the essays contained in Zamora and Behrent (ed.), *Foucault and Neoliberalism*, which investigate also the historical reasons supporting these allegations.
[161] Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 270.

of an "intransigence of freedom" analysed previously. In the first case, freedom is the fabricated and regulated positive resource of liberal and neoliberal governmentalities, whose exercise must be ceaselessly monitored in order to be guaranteed. The second instance of freedom, instead, denotes a creative practice of desubjection capable of challenging the present forms of subjec(tiva)tion. On my view, it is exactly the progressive, dangerous overshadowing of this distinction within the context of liberalism and neoliberalism that draws Foucault to engage in his later ethical reflections, which should be understood as a thorough examination of the latter meaning of freedom. Consequently, as Foucault himself clarifies, such a decisive ethical turn does not amount to a withdrawal from the political dimension, but rather to the necessary re-invention of "politics as an ethics".[162] Below I shall review this ethical turn, focusing on Foucault's investigations of the Hellenistic and Roman practices of care. The goal will be to show that his analysis of late antiquity enables Foucault to elaborate what can be defined as a "politics of the governed", which might constitute effective modes of resistance against the contemporary technologies of liberal and neoliberal government.

As a bewildering deviation from his original, unfinished plan to trace the Christian roots of the subject of desire linked to the modern *dispositif* of sexuality[163], Foucault's late reflections on ancient Greek and Roman ethical texts take as their

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[162] Foucault, "Politics and Ethics: An Interview", p. 375. "Although the theory of political power as an institution usually refers to a juridical conception of the subject of right, it seems to me that the analysis of governmentality – that is to say, of power as a set of reversible relationships – must refer to an ethics of the subject defined by the relationship of self to self. Quite simply, this means that […] power relations, governmentality, the government of the self and of others, and the relationship of self to self constitute a chain, a thread, and I think it is around these notions that we should be able to connect together the question of politics and the question of ethics" (Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 252).

[163] *The Will to Knowledge* should have been followed by further fives volumes on the history of sexuality: *La Chair et le Corps*, *La croisade des enfants*, *La femme, la mère et l'hystérique*, *Les Pervers*, *Populations et Races*. None of them was published, although there exists a draft version of volume 3. For a cursory summary of the contents of these volumes see Davidson, "Ethics as Ascetics", p. 125.

main object of study what he himself calls the "arts of existence" [*arts de l'existence*],

which is to say

> those *intentional* and *voluntary* practices [*pratiques réfléchies et volontaires*] by which
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> men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to
>
> change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an *oeuvre* that
>
> carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria.[164]

Far from tracing the history of actual sexual behaviours or history of moral codes,

these inquiries delineate a genealogy of the forms of ethical subjectivation, whose

privileged reference point is represented by "the areas of experience and the forms in

which sexual behaviour", pleasures, and desires, were "problematized, becoming an

object of concern, an element for reflection, and a material for stylization".[165] In this

respect, Foucault's history of ethics presents itself as a history of ascetics [*askesis*],

namely as the archaeo-genealogical reconstruction of the available, codified, and

recognized practices of *etho-poiesis*[166] according to which ancient Greek and Roman

individuals sought to achieve their moral accomplishment by way of a transformative,

self-reflexive test of their ethical substance.[167] Among them, Foucault devotes

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[164] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, pp. 10–1, translation amended, emphasis added.

[165] Ibid., pp. 23–4. Discussing the ancient Greeks' moral problematization of *aphrodisia* (i.e. acts of pleasure and desire intrinsically prone to excess), in this text Foucault shows how they became the target of a work of self-mastery directed at the production of a beautiful and exemplary life, which had to enable the aristocratic leading-figures of the *polis* to exercise a virtuous government over the city-state.

[166] Far from being mere inclinations or individual choices, "these practices are […] not something invented by the individual himself. They are models that he finds in his culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him by his culture, his society, and his social group" (Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom", p. 291). Contrary to what Han claims, then, for Foucault processes of subjectivation are not grounded upon "an ahistorical and monolithic conception of *recognition* as the agent of the constitution of the self" (Han, *Foucault's Critical Project,* p. 186), but rather they take shape within a wider historical context of practices, institutions and problematizations with which self-recognition is indissolubly connected (see Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 462).

[167] Indeed, Foucault defines ethics as "the process in which the individual delimits that part of himself that will form the object of his moral practice, defines his position relative to the precept he will

particular attention to the ancient practices of "care of the self" [*epimeleia heautou*]. The latter describe a continuous, vigilant, and laborious work of the self upon the self shaping a particular mode of life [*bios*] through the application of a system of techniques, whose metamorphic force presupposes not a demonstrated or revealed knowledge but rather what Foucault calls a "spirituality" or etho-poietic knowledge.[168] From Plato to the first centuries of the Christian era this knowledge defines the

> purifications, ascetic exercises, renunciations, conversions of looking, modifications of existence, etc., which are, not for knowledge but for the subject, for the subject's very being, the price to be paid for access to the truth.[169]

Hence, according to Foucault, in antiquity the subject's access to the truth hangs upon the latter's ability to operate an ethical conversion towards care. Irreducible to a form of hermeneutical examination oriented to self-renunciation, such conversion amounts to the exposition of the *distance* the subject needs to cover in order to achieve self-mastery, i.e. a "full, accomplished [*achevé*], complete, and self-sufficient relationship with oneself".[170] Whereas Foucault argues that in classical Greece the attainment of such a goal is the exclusively prerogative of a social elite – who has to care for itself in order to inscribe its virtuous government of the others and the city-state in the all-encompassing ontological order of reality[171] –, in the Hellenistic and Roman period

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follow, and decides on a certain *mode of being* that will serve as his moral goal" (Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 28, emphasis added).

[168] See Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, pp. 237–38.

[169] Ibid., p. 15.

[170] Ibid., 319–20, translation amended.

[171] Referring to the virtuous life of the man capable of self-governance, Foucault writes: "Through the *logos,* through reason and the relation to truth that governed it, such a life was committed to the maintenance and reproduction of an ontological order; moreover, it took on the brilliance of a beauty that was revealed to those able to behold it or keep its memory present in mind. Xenophon, Plato, and Aristotle often provide glimpses of this moderate existence whose hallmark, grounded in truth, was

care becomes accessible to everyone (even to a slave like Epictetus), without however acquiring universal validity.[172] By submitting his life to the test [*mise à l'épreuve*] of the truth incorporated into his ethos, every individual can ceaselessly evaluate his moral progress in the construction of an ethically harmonious connection between his words [*logoi*] and his actions [*erga*], whereby self-knowledge results in an upright and adequate relationship not only to oneself but also to others. Indeed, contrary to what many commentators have argued[173], as a form of personal *askesis* care does not point to a solipsistic, privatised, narcissistic existence[174], but rather to a social practice capable of regulating and even intensifying interpersonal relationships. This means that care is a turn towards the world as that historically situated network of power

both its regard for an ontological structure and its visibly beautiful shape" (Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 89). In this sense, Hadot evidently misplaces his critique when he argues that Foucault would not grasp the relevance of the theme of cosmic order for a correct comprehension of the ancient practices of care (see Hadot, "Reflections on the notion of the 'cultivation of the self'", especially pp. 226–27). Still, one might call into question Foucault's insistence that freedom in classical Greece takes the shape of an ethical problematization oriented solely to the active side of the governors (see Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 80 and also Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom", p. 293). On my view, Foucault's emphasis depends upon the privileged object of study, i.e. the ancient Greek regime of *aphrodisia*. In this context, the "representative model of the virtue of moderation" (Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 82), is the adult and free man that governs over women, slaves, and children, who naturally stand for the passive side of the erotic relationship. Nevertheless, already in chapter 4 of *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault considers the problematic shift introduced by relationships between free men (or, more precisely, between a free and adult man on the one hand and a young boy who is expected to become a free citizen on the other), relationships that cannot be reduced to the virtuous government of the active pole just sketched. Indeed, what is entailed by this kind of intercourses is "a relationship between [...] two moderations" (Ibid., p. 203), where the ethical problem of self-mastery affects not only the governor but also the governed, thereby supplying the potential basis for the development of the more egalitarian dynamics of friendship ("the question that was [...] posed", Foucault writes, "concerned the possible conversion – an ethically necessary and socially useful one – of the bond of love (doomed to disappear) into a relation of friendship, of *philia*", Ibid., p. 201). Consistently with what is just a chapter of his history of sexuality, however, here Foucault does not elaborate on this thematic, leaving unexplored the relationships between free men marking the Greek *polis*. For such an analysis, prematurely interrupted by his death, the reader has to wait till his last two courses at Collège the France, whose focus is represented by the emergence of the practice of *parrhesia* within the ancient *polis*. I shall briefly discuss Foucault's account of the cynic version of *parrhesia* in the main text below.

[172] The bulk of Foucault's reflections on late Greco-Roman antiquity are included in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* and in the third volume of his history of sexuality, i.e. *The Care of the Self*. Due to space constraints, I shall focus only on the former text.

[173] See, for example, Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, p. 211; Han, "Nietzsche and Foucault on Style"; Oksala, *Foucault on Freedom*, chapter 9; MacNay, "Self as Enterprise", especially p. 72; Siisiäinen, "Foucault and the Gay Counter-Conduct", pp. 316–18.

[174] Commenting on the delighted forms of pleasurable introspection developing on the West Coast at the time, Foucault asserts: "Not only do I not identify this ancient culture of the self with what you might call the Californian cult of the self, I think they are diametrically opposed" (Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics", p. 271).

relations, cultural practices, and specific knowledges in which the self tries to

rightfully shape its position:

> We have seen that directing attention on the self did not involve abstaining from the
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> world and constituting oneself as an absolute. Rather it involves the most accurate
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> measure of the place one occupies in the world and the system of necessities in which
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> one is inserted.[175]

Accordingly, care must be thought of "less as a choice opposed to political, civic,

economic and familial activity"[176], than as a way for the subject to acquire an "ethical

distance"[177] from its present modes of subjectivation. Thanks to such a distance, the

subject can reflexively take on its current social and political activities in the world as

objects of problematization, thus prospectively freeing alternative possibilities of

subjectivation that upset the governmental relationships in which subject himself is

enmeshed.[178] In brief, two main features characterize the "culture of the self"[179]

proper to Greco-Roman antiquity: (1) due to the circular relationship between

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[175] Foucault, *Dossier "Les Autres",* quoted in Gros (2005), "Course Context", p. 538. See also Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom", p. 287: "What makes it ethical for the Greeks is not that it is care for others. The care of the self is ethical in itself; but it implies complex relationships with others insofar as this ethos of freedom is also a way of caring for others. This is why it is important for a free man who conducts himself as he should to be able to govern his wife, his children, his household; it is also the art of governing. Ethos also implies a relationship with others, insofar as the care of the self enables one to occupy his rightful position in the city, the community, or interpersonal relationships, whether as a magistrate or a friend. And the care of the self also implies a relationship with the other insofar as proper care of the self requires listening to the lessons of a master. One needs a guide, a counsellor, a friend, someone who will be truthful with you. Thus, the problem of relationships with others is present throughout the development of the care of the self. […] But I don't think we can say that the Greek who cares for himself must first care for others. To my mind, this view only came later. Care for others should not be put before the care of oneself. The care of the self is ethically prior in that the relationship with oneself is ontologically prior".

[176] Foucault, *Dossier "Les Autres"*, quoted in Gros, "Course Context", p. 538.

[177] Foucault, *Dossier "Gouvernement de soi et des autres"*, quoted in Gros, "Course Context", p. 540. See also Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, especially p. 282.

[178] "The relationship to self does not detach the individual from any form of activity in the realm of the city-state, the family or friendship; it opens up, rather, as Seneca said, an *intervallum* between those activities he exercises and what constitutes him as the subject of these activities" (Foucault, *Dossier "Gouvernement de soi et des autres"*, quoted in Gros, "Course Context", p. 540. See also Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 117)

[179] Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 179.

transformative care and spiritual access to truth, the ancient mode of subjectivation does not depend on the acquisition of a detached and objective self-knowledge[180]; (2) far from being the result of the quest for an authentic self[181], the self-determining ethical subject of the ancient technologies of the self is not the Kantian subject defined by its obedience to the order of the moral law, but rather the Nietzschean subject as instance of positive valorisation[182], i.e. an artisan committed to a work upon itself that has no "relation with the juridical per se, with an authoritarian system, with a disciplinary structure".[183] As a result, for Foucault, there is a fundamental heterogeneity between the ancient practice of care and our mode of subjectivation, which Foucault qualifies at the same time as Christian, modern, and Western. Indeed, the "Cartesian moment" of modernity is marked by a different epistemic configuration.[184] According to the latter, the relationship between subjectivity and truth is no longer mediated through *askesis*, but rather through the universal, a priori structure of an act of objective knowledge grounded in clear evidence and scientific method, which finds its target in a uniform realm of objects. Correlatively, the ancient idea of life as an ethical and political "material for an aesthetic piece of art"[185] [*bios*] is replaced by a conception of life as a set of bioeconomic processes [*zoe*], whose

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[180] "I think we quite spontaneously pose the question of the relation between subject and knowledge in the following form: can there be an objectification [*objectivation*] of the subject? […] in the culture of the self of the Hellenistic and Roman period, the question never arises of whether the subject is objectifiable [*objectivable*], whether the same mode of knowledge can be applied to the subject as is applied to things of the world and whether the subject is really part of these knowable things of the world" (Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, pp. 317–18)

[181] See Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics", p. 262.

[182] For a similar remark see Gros, "I trattati sul matrimonio e la questione della sessualizzazione dell'Eros in *Soggettività e verità*", p. 24

[183] Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics", p. 260. "When we pose the question of the subject in the realm of practice […], quite spontaneously – I do not mean 'quite naturally', but I should say rather 'quite historically', and through a necessity that weighs heavily on us – we think it obvious that this question 'how should we consider the subject and what he should make of himself?' [must be posed] in terms of the law. Now, in the culture of the self of Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman civilization, the problem of the subject in his relation to practice leads, I believe, to something quite different from the question of the law. It leads to this: How can the subject act as he ought, how can he be as he ought to be, not only inasmuch as he knows the truth, but inasmuch as he says it, practices it, and exercises it?" (Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 318).

[184] Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 14.

[185] Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics", p. 260.

knowledge becomes the primary condition for the effective deployment of the individualizing and totalizing political "arithmetic" [186] of the modern arts of government. Hence, while no longer connecting the ancient self-technologies to the acquisition of a self-renouncing state of purity – as in the case of the Christian hermeneutics of desire – but rather to the project of shaping a new subject, the disciplinary and biopolitical apparatuses of human sciences and modern state governmentality take over the activity of care of the self[187], thus producing an alteration in its moral self-constitution. On my view, the best way to focalize this shift is to examine what happens under these apparatuses to the four aspects of ethical subjectivation Foucault identifies, i.e. the ethical substance, the mode of subjectivation, the ethical practices of the self, and the *telos* of ethics[188]: (1) these apparatuses reframe individuals' ethical substance in terms of their economic and biological efficiency; (2) their universal laws of normation and normalization call individuals to mould themselves as rational, healthy and compliant subjects marked by the confession of their true desires, the maximisation of their interests, and the liberation from illusionary and repressive forms of power; (3) while disciplinary power fashions individuals through its productive mechanisms, the biopolitical technologies of security ensure the regulatory control of population through the organization of a thriving and secure social environment, in which each individuals can exercise his liberties; (4) their *telos* consists in the constitution of governable subjects through a modality of power that demands of itself to be no longer wise and just but measured, calculative, and effective. The modern episteme, therefore, reconfigures not only the correlation between government and truth but also the connection between politics and ethics: contrary to what happen in classical antiquity,

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[186] Foucault, "The Political Technology of Individuals", p. 408.
[187] See McGushin, *Foucault's Askesis*, p. 238.
[188] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, pp. 26–8.

ethical problematization no longer appears on the side of the governors, but rather – as Foucault himself suggests – on the side of those who are governed.[189]

Hence, we can appreciate the relevance of Foucault's reconstruction of the Hellenistic and Roman practices of care for the delineation of resistive models to our modern form of subjec(tiva)tion, especially to its liberal and neo-liberal variants. Indeed, what his investigations of the Hellenistic and Roman ethics seem to outline is the archaeo-genealogy of a politics of the governed, which is "capable of reacquiring a contemporary meaning, in the manner of one of those pagan temple columns that are occasionally reutilized in more recent structures".[190] However, one must exert some caution here: Foucault's ethical inquiries are not a reformulation of the 20th century shibboleth of a return to antiquity – whose ethics Foucault "judged as undesirable as impossible to resuscitate"[191] –, but rather the attempt to disclose a past field of possibilities that might bear traction in our present. To put it differently, given that the ancient technologies of the self have been absorbed within the governmental *dispositifs* of modern power, Foucault argues that the latter include within themselves a potentially resistive set of etho-poietic practices, resources and "styles" that once reactualized might enable their creative and unexpected transformation from *within* the modern regime of truth.[192] The closest Foucault gets in the elaboration of these

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[189] In this sense, Foucault identifies the major political question of our time in the "right of the governed" (see Foucault, "Va-t-on extrader Klaus Croissant?"). On this specific point, see also P. Cesaroni, *Michel Foucault: Archeologia, Governamentalità, Governo di sé*, p. 209.

[190] Veyne, "The Final Foucault and His Ethics", p. 231.

[191] Ibid. As Foucault clarifies in one of his late interviews: "Q. Do you think that the Greeks offer an attractive and plausible alternative? M.F. No! I am not looking for an alternative; you can't find the solution of a problem in the solution of another problem raised at another moment by other people" (Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics", p. 256. See also Ibid., p. 258).

[192] "By locating the distant origin of discipline and biopower in unfamiliar practices of the self, Foucault shows that the possibility of resistance resides within the very relationships of power and knowledge that constituted the danger of modernity" (McGushin, *Foucault's Askesis*, p. 99). Accordingly, Dews is mistaken when he argues that Foucault's aesthetic conception of ethics risks being complicit with the lifestyle consumerism of contemporary capitalism (Dews, "The Return of the Subject in Late Foucault", p. 40). Indeed, capitalist lifestyles are pre-determined solutions promoted as universal and not resistive practices of freedom directed at questioning one's mode of subjectivation.

connections[193] is when in his last course at Collège the France he delineates an archaeo-genealogical link between the particular variant of care of the self represented by cynicism and the revolutionary movements of the 19th century:

> Coming closer to our own time, it would also be interesting to analyse another support of the Cynic mode of being, of Cynicism understood as form of life in the scandal of the truth. […] Here, of course, I am thinking of revolutionary movements […]. Cynicism, the idea of a mode of life as the irruptive, violent, scandalous manifestation of the truth is and was part of revolutionary practice and of the forms taken by revolutionary movements throughout the nineteenth century. Revolution in the modern European world was not just a political project; it was also a form of life.[194]

Indeed, Foucault describes the cynic practice as a "militantism in the world and against the world", in which the true life defines "an other life [*une vie autre*], […] a life of combat, for a changed world".[195] Foucault argues that such alteration takes the shape of a "dramatization"[196] grounded upon the idea of philosophical life as a manifestation of the truth in and through one's body.[197] The explanation of this dramatic procedure requires that we briefly examine the broader context in which Foucault addresses it, namely his investigations of the ancient practice of *parrhesia*. According to Foucault, *parrhesia* can be defined in the following way: "*parrhesia* is the courage of the truth in the person who speaks and who, regardless of everything, takes the risk of telling the whole truth that he thinks, but it is also the interlocutor's

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[193] Although he did no live long enough to carry out this project, it is Foucault himself who explicitly voices his hopes to return, after his "long Greco-Latin *trip*", to "some contemporary problems" (Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*, p. 2). Indeed, for him, the constitution of an ethics of the self today is an "urgent, fundamental, and politically indispensable task", since "there is no first or final point of resistance to political power other than in the relationship one has to oneself" (Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 252).

[194] Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*, p. 183.

[195] Ibid., p. 303.

[196] Ibid., p. 253.

[197] Ibid., p. 172.

courage in agreeing to accept the hurtful truth that he hears".[198] Distinguishing itself

from the demonstrative structure of discourse and from the captivating devices of

sophistry, then, *parrhesia* is a risky practice of public critique, which confronts the

dominant authorities with a truth capable of unsettling the consensual logic of the

hegemonic apparatuses of veridiction.[199] As is testified by the emblematically

parrhesiastic figure of Socrates, however, this truth does not remain at a discursive

level but is rather embodied in the lifestyle of the *parrhesiastes*, who is called to

maintain an exemplar coherence between his words [*logoi*] and actions [*erga*].

"*Parrhesia*", Foucault writes, "is speech that is equivalent to commitment, to a bond

[…] between the subject of enunciation and the subject of conduct. […] At the very

moment [the subject] says 'I speak the truth', he commits himself to do what he says

and to be the subject of conduct who conforms in every respect to the truth he

expresses".[200] Such performative element of *parrhesia* reaches its paradoxical climax

in the cynic act of veridiction as an ethical relationship with oneself and others where

the verbal component leaves the stage to a material and physical manifestation of the

truth in the scandal of one's body. More specifically, as a response to the crisis of the

Athenian democracy during the 5th and 4th century B.C. – which is determined by the

problematic degeneration of political *parrhesia* into a rhetorical game of deceitful

opinions –, the cynic practice of philosophical *parrhesia* elevates nature [*zoe*] to the

ethical principle of a different form of life [*bios*] through a radicalization of the

commonly accepted values and modes of existence marking the ancient conception of

the true life, in the attempt to reveal the falsehood of the prevailing cultural customs.

It is not by chance, in fact, that the central postulate of Cynicism is "change the value

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[198] Ibid., p. 13.
[199] Ibid., 161.
[200] Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Self*, p. 406.

of the currency".[201] Consider, for instance, the idea of the true life as a life of non-concealment: the ancient social conventions recommend that this life be a modest and discreet one, which avoids appearing offensive to the eyes of others. To the contrary, cynicism applies "this principle of non-concealment literally" and "explodes the code of propriety with which this principle remained, implicitly or explicitly, associated" by proclaiming an art of living that is entirely public and unable to hide its shameless and crude naturalness.[202] In this respect, submitting the other principles of the true life to the same altering procedure[203], the cynic (personified by the figure of Diogenes) problematizes the relationship between truth and life through the test of his actions, body, and words, whose scandalous insurgence denounces the overriding modes of subjectivation as counterfeit money. For Foucault, therefore, what marks cynicism is a kind of "transvaluation"[204], according to which certain aspects of a given culture are freed from their habitual codification and raised to the reference points of a veridicative practice of care of the self and the others geared to overcome the vices of humanity through a salvific politics of community. But while Foucault insists on the resurgence of this style of life as the scandalous embodiment of an unacceptable truth in the leftist revolutionary movements of modern Europe, I think that the procedure of transvaluation distinguishing the cynic practice can be carried further and employed to clarify the strategies of the contemporary struggles for the common, i.e. for an model of social organization capable of transcending the modern dichotomy between the private dynamics of the market and the public paradigm of the state as it

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[201] Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*, p. 226.
[202] Ibid, p. 255, translation amended.
[203] As Foucault clarifies, the cynics dramatize the traditional theme of the unalloyed life in the exaltation of absolute poverty. By indexing it to nature, they take the principle of a straight life to its extreme and give positive value to animality. Finally, they transform sovereign life into a militant life of battle oriented to the salvation of the whole human community by way of a change in its ethos (Ibid., pp. 251–89).
[204] Ibid., p. 253.

has been re-structured by neoliberal policies.[205] Seeking to model the processes through which individuals valorise and give shape to their life according to the paradigm of the responsible and performative enterprise, neoliberal governmentality encourages salaried workers, consumers, and users to cooperate in the production of social goods, which are then expropriated and exploited by private companies and public administrations. This type of power investment can be clearly seen, for instance, in the constant provocation to share personal data, whose information is utilized to discover commercial patterns, enhance workplace productivity, reduce costs, refine targeting strategies, or even to open up new markets; or in the total commitment the competitive logic of the enterprise demands from its "collaborators", who are encouraged to take collective initiatives in the interests of the corporation as if the latter coincided with their own; or, finally, in the current economic government by debt, whereby the money of taxpayers is socialized not in view of a fairer economic redistribution but rather for the repayment of the debts incurred by states with private and public lenders. Conversely, the objective of the current struggles for the common is to play these practices of collective cooperation against neoliberal capitalism through a subversive transvaluation that identifies in the government by the common its own rationality. What marks the "Occupy" struggles in the United States, the struggles for the common usage of cultural places and public services in Italy, or the struggles for the shared management of urban spaces in Turkey (just to name a few), therefore, is the emergence of counter-conductive modes of subjectivation oriented to the production of new social relationships, institutional arrangements, and forms of right grounded in the radical refusal of sectarian identities, the direct deliberation over the rules of co-existence, the collective sharing

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[205] I have found a recent confirmation of this hypothesis in Sauvêtre, "Foucault avec Marx" (see especially pp. 278–85).

and care of available resources, the egalitarian participation in the life of the community, and, above all, a certain "ethos of the inappropriable"[206], whose transformative potential threatens to short-circuit from within the conductive logic of neoliberalism itself.

In a nutshell, if the regime of scientific and epistemological truth characterizing the modern arts of governmental power demands us to shape our subjectivity according to it, Foucault's late investigations of the Hellenistic and Roman practices of care represent the occasion to reformulate truth as the ethical force of a distinctive politics of the governed based upon a problematizing and creative movement of resistance, which shows the relaunched possibility to institute a critical difference no longer between the past and our present, but between the present and our future.

3. Brothers in Arms

The proceeding exploration of Foucault's interpretation of ancient Greek and Roman philosophy has enabled me to show that the crucial stake of his conception of resistance is the link the governed are called to draw between the immanent, productive dimension of freedom on the one hand and the relationship they maintain with themselves on the other, whereby as Foucault claims "not only we have to defend ourselves, not only affirm ourselves, as an identity but as a creative force".[207] Against this background, it is not difficult to understand why Foucault expresses all his praise for the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. What captures his attention is the fact that in the context of these movements "certain institutional models have been experimented with without a program". That their action was without a program does not mean it was not organized. And yet, this refusal to have a

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[206] Sauvêtre, "Foucault avec Marx", p. 281.
[207] Foucault, "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity", p. 164.

program can be "very original and creative" insofar as organized practice is plunged into the agonistic reality of the present games of power thereby preventing its sclerotization. Hence, whereas since the 19th century great political institutions and political parties have "tried to give to political creation the form of a political program in order to take over power", for Foucault one of the elements of the 1960s and 1970s that should be preserved is that "there has been political innovation, political creation, and political experimentation outside the great political parties, and outside the normal or ordinary program". As Foucault continues, "these social movements have really changed our whole lives, our mentality, our attitudes, and the attitudes and mentality of other people – people who do not belong to these movements. And that is something very important and positive".[208] Although Foucault's perspective was decisively franco-centric, I think these remarks can be easily extended to comprehend the German student movement. Indeed, Finlayson has recently emphasised that "the praxis envisaged by the students was not simply a strategy for overthrowing the existing order, and of merely instrumental value, nor was it confined to the negative mode of criticism and protest. Their praxis was constitutive of, and was to help to generate, a counterculture, a new society gestating in the interstices of the old". For example, students formed communes that exhibited a critique of the central features of the traditional bourgeois family; they "extended the boundaries of the political to include many aspects of personal life" previously deemed matters of private existence; and finally, they created new institutions that were "pre-figurations in the present of the better ones to which they aspired", like an autonomous, student-run "critical university" modelled after soviet democracy

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[208] Ibid., pp. 172–73.

[*Rätedemokratie*].[209]

To the contrary, despite the cursory allusions in his 1956/57 lecture series to purposeless experimentation as a way to resist social determination[210], Adorno's austere negativism leads him to regard all these innovative aspects as delusional and even inappropriate. Undoubtedly, German students were wrong to believe that a revolution was about to happen – especially if one considers that, unlike in the French case, their action did not enjoy the support of workers and trade unions. However, my claim is that Adorno's dismissal of the students' counterculture as merely illusory points to the crucial limitations his critical project runs against when he seeks to translate his theoretical insights into effective recommendations for emancipatory resistance. In order to substantiate this claim, allow me to recall my discussion of Adorno's notion of possibility at the end of Chapter 4. As we have seen, by the latter category he means apparently unreal possibilities that are precluded by the actual configuration of damaged existence, whose disclosure is the task of the critical activity of thought. What the realization of these possibilities requires, for Adorno, is "civil courage"[211] [*Zivilcourage*], namely the courage to stand up against the flow in order to negate the badness of our experience, no matter how meagre the chances to win one's cause might look like at first glace. MacDonald has proposed a helpful example to illustrate the issue, namely the well-known episode of Rosa Parks.[212] Breaching the laws of Alabama, in 1955 Rosa Parks refuses to give up her seat on a bus to a standing white passenger. "I don't think I should stand up", Parks replies to the police officer arrived on the scene. As showed by the reverberations of her gesture, Parks reveals that a different society is possible, in which the racial equality

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[209] Finlayson, "The Question of Praxis in Adorno's Critical Theory", pp. 58–9. See also Kraushaar, *Frankfurter Schule 2*, pp. 415–17.
[210] I owe this reference to Freyenhagen. See his *Adorno's Practical Philosophy*, pp. 170–71.
[211] Adorno, "Notes on Philosophical Thinking", p. 132.
[212] See MacDonald, "'What Is, Is More than It Is'", p. 44.

denied by the discriminatory provisions of state legislation could finally be realized. Still, what MacDonald does not notice is that acts of determinate negation like Rosa Parks' can prove to be effective practices of resistance against oppressive forms of exploitation, marginalization, and injustice (in Foucault's vocabulary "states of domination"), but they loose much of their disclosive force in contexts dominated by more subtle mechanisms of power such as liberal and especially neoliberal technologies of government. As we have seen above, in fact, the neoliberal art of government is centred upon the production of an open, free, and differentiated mode of subjectivation, whereby reactive attempts at escaping social determination are co-opted in advance by its biopolitical deployments as already contemplated possibilities of behaviour that can be easily turned into market products for the globalized economy. From my point of view, this is the reason why Foucault's conception of resistance as a creative practice of desubjection seems to be able to respond more adequately to the challenges freedom has to face in the present time: without conceding anything to abstract utopianism, the governed must proceed to a problematization of the historical conditions of their modes of subjectivation in order to enable the ethico-political production of a radically alternative truth, whose experimentation not only thwarts the operative mechanisms of the discursive and governmental apparatuses shaping their identities, but also enlarges their sense of the possible by transforming the forms of self- and other-relation at the basis of the prevailing regime of aspectival captivity.

Nevertheless, although I think there is much to be praised in his critique of the double bind marking the modern arts of government and in his appeal to resistance as a self-transformative practice of freedom, I also believe that Foucault's politics of truth stands in need of an essential integration, which might be provided by Adorno's

social theory. Indeed, Foucault's archaeo-genealogical focus on the historically contingent interaction between techniques of domination and technologies of the self draws him to overlook the social dynamics of class and gender inequalities as they are manifested in the unequal diffusion of those negative experiences that can be summarized under the label of "social suffering". As McNay emphasises, although he is well aware of the suffering caused by various forms of oppression, Foucault never explores for instance either the "emotional and psychic costs" associated with the neoliberal re-organization of the self as an enterprise or "how they might intersect with existing and emergent inequalities", which are fuelled by such diverse but interrelated phenomena as the feminisation of poverty, precarisation of labour, and long-term unemployment.[213] In this sense, Foucault tends to highlight the ethico-political possibilities of inventive self-transformation within the actual social arrangement to the detriment of a phenomenological interpretation of the painful social experiences of domination and exclusion that constitute an obstacle for the engagement of individuals in effective political resistance. To put it otherwise, what Foucault's appeal to an agonistic ethos of difference seems to presuppose is the ability of the subjects to intervene as political agents against the deployments of power moulding their life, whereas in effect their ability hangs upon the realization of an unexamined series of emotional, psychological, and social dispositions that are crippled under conditions of inequality and domination perceived as unmodifiable and paralyzing.[214] Now, I believe that such a gap between his exhortation to a radical ethics of creativity and the negative experience of the governed can be bridged by complementing Foucault's project with Adorno's politics of suffering. Premised upon

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[213] McNay, "The Politics of Suffering and Recognition", p. 61.
[214] For an insightful critique of the "social weightlessness" marking the bulk of post-foundational political theory (including Foucault's) see again McNay, *The Misguided Search for the Political*.

the idea that "the need to lend a voice to suffering is a condition of all truth"[215], in fact, Adorno's interdisciplinary research project assigns to theory the critical task of equipping social sciences with the necessary clinical tools for elaborating a dialectical knowledge of the subjective and objective components of the everyday experiences of suffering in late capitalist societies[216], which often remain below the threshold of public debate because they are considered merely private matters. Accordingly, opposing their widespread disavowal and euphemization, Adorno calls for attentiveness to psycho-social instances of suffering as concrete expressions of the evils (misrecognition, unfreedom, alienation, inequality, reification, etc.) afflicting our modern social world, whose moral demand for reparation – once adequately revealed – is meant to challenge the depoliticising effects engendered by the internalization of symbolic power in terms of feelings of powerlessness, resignation, and hopelessness. In this respect, Adorno's politics of suffering might be thought of as the preliminary step of a compounded account of resistance, according to which the mitigation of experiences of suffering would produce the material and psychological conditions necessary for individuals to engage in the more progressive forms of contestation Foucault rightly envisions. Yet, in light of what I argued above, such alliance can be achieved only on the provisos that (1) one relaxes the austerity of Adorno's negativism so as to make room for practices of experimentation with ways of living; (2) one disposes of Adorno's speculative philosophy of history, whose gestural and repetitious character threats to loose sight of the historical specificity of the psycho-social experience under late capitalism; (3) one takes care that the politics of suffering does not turn into sentimentalist modes of suffer-mongering[217], whereby

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[215] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 17.
[216] Ibid., pp. 17–8.
[217] Although I deem her appeal to break with the discourse of suffering altogether too strong, for a Foucauldian critique of contemporary politics as suffering-mongering, see Brown, *States of Injury*.

suffering becomes the source of a morally authentic truth which attaches individuals to their normalized identity as victims smothering their political imagination.

In conclusion, I would dare to say that Adorno and Foucault are brothers in arms, even though the contribution of the different modalities of resistance they endorse in the struggle against modern governmental power is not on a par. Both of them start from the exigency to rethink *ex novo* the structure of the individual subject as an ethico-political category endowed with an emancipatory value, whose socio-historical action can question the *principium individuationis* ruling our societies.[218] While this leads Adorno to stress the experiences in which individuals perceive their vulnerability as blind spots for the emergence of recognition-based practices of "solidarity with tormentable bodies" that might point beyond our cold and damaged life of expendable monades[219], Foucault's late ethical reflections encourage creative practices of self-stylisation as political tools for building networks of solidarity amongst individuals and groups in order to resist the abuses of power over the governed.[220] It is this appeal to solidarity with those who fight for their freedom, therefore, that Adorno and Foucault pass down to us as a task, a task we are called to relaunch at the height of the present.

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[218] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 149.

[219] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 286. In *Minima Moralia*, Adorno explicitly states that "the abolition of the monad through solidarity would at the same time prepare the ground for saving the single being, who only in relation to the general becomes particular" (Ibid., p. 135).

[220] Foucault goes so far as to argue that "there exists an international citizenship that has its rights and its duties, and that obliges one to speak out against every abuse of power, whoever its author, whoever its victims. After all, we are all members of the community of the governed, and thereby obliged to show mutual solidarity" (Foucault, "Confronting Government: Human Rights", p. 474).

Conclusion

As is well-known, in the second half of the 20th century critical theory has undergone a deep transformation. The research program of the first generation of Frankfurt theorists seeks to throw a bridge between different insights from Marx, Weber, and Freud in order to formulate a radical critique of the forms of domination and unfreedom marking the pathological alliance between the functional mechanisms of late capitalism, Enlightenment instrumental rationality, and state bureaucratization in advanced Western society. To the contrary, thinkers like Habermas, Honneth, and Forst engage in the construction of a theory of society based on discursively and symbolically mediated dynamics of social integration, intersubjective forms of mutual recognition, and moral-cognitive capacities for justification, whose rational norms supposedly provide the necessary ground of an authentically democratic form of ethical life. On my view, however, what distinguishes this paradigm shift is the progressive relinquishment of the original tasks of critical theory, which thereby comes to be divested of much of its emancipatory potential. Indeed, the contemporary brand of critical theory falls prey to a kind of "neo-Idealist" inflection, according to which the reconstruction of the normative rationality at the root of human being's communicative action and recognitive relations takes precedence at the expense of an analysis of the "concrete forms of social power that shape consciousness, social relations, culture, and the contours of modernity".[1] By insulating their principles from the material matrix of social reality, contemporary critical theory's turn to intersubjective modes of recognition oriented to mutual understanding and social solidarity comes at the price of loosing sight of the crucial role played by power-

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[1] Thompson, "The Neo-Idealist Paradigm Shift in Contemporary Critical Theory", p. 139.

laden historical processes in the constitution of the prevailing institutional structures and models of subject-formation. Put differently, the attempts of the second and third generation Frankfurt theorists at building a critical theory of society grounded in the normative claims of intersubjective social practices that are sealed off from the pressures of the socio-economic world neglect the reciprocal imbrication of the prevailing values and norms with power relations. The result is a purified conception of social life that is insufficiently attentive to the ways in which the moral and symbolic modalities of action and cognition the neo-Idealists see at the basis of social integration are informed by the rationalized apparatuses of power marking modern capitalist societies, whose enduring dominance is guaranteed by the conditions of captivity deriving from individuals' adoption of legitimizing value-orientations that constrain their capacity to reflect upon and make judgments about the world they inhabit.

Now, the conviction motivating my work is that, for critical theory to regain effectiveness as a political project capable of addressing the historical configuration of the present society, one should better forsake this shift towards a neo-Idealist moral theory and proceed to a re-evaluation of the theoretical resources provided by a different line of thought connecting the research program of the first generation of the Frankfurt School as epitomised in Theodor Adorno's work and Michel Foucault's archaeo-genealogical reflections, namely what the latter calls a critical "ontology of actuality". The salient feature of Adorno's and Foucault's historical ontologies, in fact, consists in their awareness that the possibility of articulating an immanent critique of modernity hangs upon the ability to problematize the constitutive nature of the mechanisms of power responsible for the dangers, pathologies and injustices endemic to its social structures and forms of subjectivity, while revealing the

unquestioned role played by our normative commitments and evaluative standards in sustaining and occluding those very same mechanisms through heteronomous processes of rationalization and internalization. In this respect, Adorno's inquiries into late capitalist society and Foucault's analyses of modern biopolitical techniques of domination offer an "internal ethnology of our culture and rationality"[2], which discloses how our experience has been carved out of a series of historical processes marked by the dangerous entanglement of normative ideals with relations of power and domination. The result is a discomforting effect of estrangement that creates the necessary critical distance not only to map the instabilities and contradictions intrinsic in the existing socio-cultural configuration, but also to identify the materials one might take up in the attempt to foster the radical transformation of our practices in the direction of an open-ended future, where the emancipatory promises of the Enlightenment project could be better realized.

Beyond the scholarly reconstruction of a dialogue that denies the often erroneously assumed incompatibility between their perspectives, therefore, at stake in my comparison of Adorno's and Foucault's enterprises is the assessment of the continued relevance of their conceptual repertoire and methodological approaches for the theory and practice of a kind of social criticism that would help us understand who we are and, at the same time, imagine less unjust and more democratic forms of sociality. To put it simply, who between Adorno and Foucault is our best allied in the critical struggle against the forms of domination that shape contemporary society? In order to give a final answer to this question, here I shall review the findings of my analyses, starting with the results of the comparative investigations into the explanatory-diagnostic side of their projects I carried out in the first two chapters.

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[2] Foucault, "On the Ways of Writing History", p. 293.

In Chapter 1, I confronted Adorno's picture of social domination with Foucault's early analytics of power. This allowed me to emphasise the remarkable proximity of their insights into the productive nature of power, which is confirmed by their complementary examinations of the disciplinary construction of modern individuals. On Adorno's view, the passage from the 19th century liberal phase of capitalist development to the monopolistic state capitalism of the 20th century corresponds to the definitive subordination of the ego's function to the irrational energies of the superego, which command the individual's unconditional adjustment to the reifying imperatives of production and consumption imposed by the institutional authorities, the bureaucratic agencies, and the psychotechnologies of culture industry of our totally administered society. Under the ideological veil of Enlightenment progress, then, Adorno detects the coercive and levelling pressures of the anonymous force of social integration, which mould individuals' self so as to adapt it to the norms sanctioned by the universal logic of capitalist exchange.

Foucault's genealogical inquiries into the rise of disciplines between 17th and 18th century largely echo these remarks. Reversing the interpretative framework of the "macrophysics of sovereignty" characterizing the traditional discourse of political philosophy, in fact, Foucault claims that the distinctive feature of disciplinary power is the pervasive capture of the individual's body and actions in its concrete, everyday existence: drawing on the procedures of observation, examination, and classification of modern human sciences, disciplinary power puts in place a regime of constant surveillance and an infra-judicial mechanism of penalization that control not only what individuals do, but also what they *can* do, think, and say so as to fabricate their identity as economically useful yet politically docile subjects. Hence, like Adorno, Foucault conceives of the individual not as a transhistorical invariant, but rather as

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the "historical correlate" of a series of *dispositifs* of power-knowledge that fasten "the subject-function to [its] somatic singularity", while projecting behind the body something like a "psyche" that further reinforces disciplinary norms as the principle of its internalized subjection.[3]

Despite the convergence between Foucault's investigations of the function of disciplines as a political anatomy of the human body and Adorno's socio-psychological account of domination, however, I argued that Adorno's and Foucault's reflections are premised upon two different approaches to the question of power: whereas Adorno draws a monist portrait of the negative totality of late capitalist society centred around the predominance of the fetish abstraction of the capitalist exchange principle as the source of a top-down, ideological form of power that reifies every dimension of social and personal life, Foucault denies that power can be reduced to a homogeneous and all-explaining phenomenon derived from the self-perpetuating dynamics of capitalist economy. Rather, for Foucault, the study of the economic mechanisms needs to be integrated with a bottom-up, pluralist conception of power as a cluster of nonegalitarian and intentional relations between forces that are ubiquitous within the social body, whose institutional and political macro-structures represent the points of strategic coordination of these very same relations. As a result, not only does Foucault avoid the economicistic reductionism still lingering in Adorno's claims about the functional subordination of political power to the economy, but he also forsakes Adorno's abstract presupposition of a kind of uniformity between diverse configurations of power in favour of a more fine-grained analysis of their historical and regional specificity.

This last point is reflected in their respective accounts of reason, which has direct

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[3] Foucault, *Psychiatric Power*, p. 55.

bearings on their critique of the socio-cultural systems that condition modern individuals' experience. Indeed, demarcating his position from a vision that identifies the "global instance of reality" with society as a "totality to be reproduced"[4], the task Foucault assigns to his critical history of thought is to explore how forms of rationality are incorporated within systems of discursive and non-discursive practices, while pointing out the modifications these processes engender in the intrinsic logic of people's behaviour. More precisely, Foucault's philosophical method takes the shape of a series of historical interrogations geared to illuminate how the failings of past practices lead to the emergence of certain historical problematizations, which transform the regimes of truth and error that govern what is intelligible by setting out the conditions of possibility of the different forms of rationality that are advanced as their solution in connection with particular material forces of power.

To the contrary, Adorno presents us with a one-sided account of the history of Western civilisation, according to which its pathological quality derives from the fact that its successive, contingent stages – up to the administered-capitalist phase of late modern bourgeois society – consolidate the mechanisms of paranoid repression of nature and ideological exaltation of the mind marking the purposive domination of enlightenment instrumental rationality since human beings' primordial attempts at self-preservation, thereby belying the original promise of a future reconciliation with nature in rational social praxis.

Accordingly, while Foucault's archaeo-genealogical project consists in a series of historical problematizations conducted in terms of an analysis of specific forms of rationality as they are materialized in local apparatuses of power-knowledge, Adorno's thought collapses this plurality into an unidirectional picture of Western

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[4] Foucault, "La poussière e le nuage", p. 834.

civilization aimed at unearthing the non-conceptual experience of suffering behind the monolithic process of identitarian rationalization driving our natural history, whereby his speculative move not only replaces historical variation with a single and repetitive explanation, but also sanctions Adorno's ultimate inability to depart from the traditional understanding of ideology as false coconsciousness.

As I showed in Chapter 2, the greater subtlety and openness of Foucault's multiple and pragmatic diagnoses of modern systems of power-knowledge become even more evident when one compares Adorno holistic theory of advanced capitalist society with Foucault's later inquiries into the history of the modern arts of government. In order to make my case, after highlighting the resonance of their claims about the connection between the rise of capitalism and the biopolitical configuration of modern power, I provided a detailed examination of Adorno's and Foucault's respective pictures of the political culture of liberalism.

Again, prima facie, this examination illustrated how Adorno's and Foucault's positions mirror one another: within modern liberal society, social power operates in such a way as to harness individuals' self-formation to compliant and increasingly controllable forms of subjectivity, whether that might be the governable figure of *homo œconomicus* Foucault refers to as the correlate of liberal governmentality, or the manipulable and reified character-mask of late capitalism Adorno describes. Yet, under a closer scrutiny, what arises behind their confluence is an crucial divergence concerning both the nature of our (un)freedom and the operations through which social power exert its constitutive function.

As the reader might recall, for Adorno, within advanced liberal society the celebration of bourgeois individuals as free and substantial selves is a mere ideological delusion: the all-pervasive system of exchange society, in fact, strips

individuals of their autonomy by way of a compulsive process of internalized normalization that moulds their identity as replaceable appendages of the machinery of capitalist production. Whatever one does, then, is destined to perpetuate and even entrench the radically evil order of our modern social world, wherein biopolitical reification not only produces physical and psychical suffering on an on-going basis, but also undermines the conditions necessary for the realization of a morally right form of living capable of eradicating that suffering. In this respect, Adorno has surely the merit of underlining the importance of a phenomenological account of subjective experiences of marginalisation, exploitation, and alienation for our comprehension of contemporary domination in its most aggressive and virulent manifestations. Nevertheless, since it conceives of our social world as a total organisation ruled by an all-pervasive form of ideological and disciplinary integration, Adorno's theory presents two major shortcomings: first, he fails to note that modern power over life does not function uniformly at the individual and collective level, but rather results from the articulation of two interrelated forms, i.e. the individualizing one of disciplines and the totalizing one of the biopolitics of population. Secondly, Adorno also looses sight of the changes in the techniques of power brought about by the development of liberalism, thereby precluding an adequate understanding of the morphology of power relations that innervate our experience.

As we saw, instead, the destiny of what he calls modernity's political "double bind" is precisely the focus around which Foucault organizes his later explorations of the secular transposition of the ancient pastoral power into the modern arts of government, from the *dispositifs* of *raison d'État* to the liberal regimes of governmentality. More specifically, as a frugal practice of government modelled after the politico-economic knowledge of the quasi-natural dynamics of market economy,

Foucault thinks that at the heart of the liberal doctrine of *laissez-faire* one finds a distinctive interplay between freedom and security: in order to derive the general wealth of society from the essentially plural game of its actors' interests, liberal government cannot but avail itself of a set of biopolitical apparatuses of security that intervene into the social milieu so as to regulate the optimal conditions for subjects to pursue their free and responsible venture in a risky market system, whereby *homo œconomicus'* freedom is not a mere ideological illusion, but rather an "artificially arranged product and instrument of governmental practices".[5] Extending its political rationality to all Western governmental regimes between the 19th and 20th century – including those which are explicitly anti-liberal, like the welfare state –, then, Foucault holds that liberalism represents a crucial point of inflection in the configuration of modern power technologies. On the one hand, liberalism marks the general expansion of the disciplinary procedures of normalization Foucault already discusses in his early genealogical writings, a process that reaches its zenith in the context of the fordist mode of social regulation marking the Keynesian welfare state. On the other hand, though, liberalism also introduces technologies of security, whose innovative mechanisms of control progressively acquire pre-eminence over the old and uneconomic disciplinary power.

Focused as it is on disciplinary integration, Adorno's theory bears no trace of this decisive alteration in the economy of power. Moreover, his premature death precludes him from observing the authentic crisis faced by the disciplinary model of exchange society during the late 1970s, namely at the time of the shift from the welfarist and fordist regime of accumulation to the postfordist regime of regulation. To the contrary, Foucault must be credited for anticipating the implications of this crucial

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[5] Lemke, *Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique*, p. 45.

historical transformation before the latter fully plays out. The analyses of German ordoliberalism and American anarcho-capitalism, in fact, allow him to illuminate the political rationality that has historically served as the discursive matrix of the neoliberal art of government, "which has now become the program of most governments in capitalist countries".[6] As Foucault explains, such a political project does not amount to a return to the liberal rule of *laissez-faire*. Rather, as a response to the economic interventionism of the welfare state, the novelty of neoliberalism consists in a general re-organization of the practices of government around the artificial logic of market economy, whereby the state is required to operate constant political and legal interventions geared to ensure the diffusion of the model of competitive enterprise throughout all dimensions of the social body. Under the neoliberal regime of governmentality, for Foucault, the internal subjection of individuals makes way to securitarian mechanisms of control, whose action on the risk-laden environment of the socio-economic reality triggers modes of subjectivation fashioning manageable and responsible self-investors of human capital, thereby promoting the exploitative optimization of the multiple differences deriving from life's valorisation processes within the project of capitalist economic growth. As a result, Foucault can argue that what is at stake in the neoliberal affirmation of the market as the regulatory principle of society is not the construction of a mass society normalized according to the standardizing logic of commodity-exchange. Undoubtedly, such a type of society was the legitimate object of the critique of social theorists like Adorno, since it represented the explicit or implicit horizon of the arts of government between the 1920s and the 1960s. However, as is confirmed by recent studies of neoliberalism, Foucault is right when he claims that we have passed that

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[6] Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 149.

stage: through a series of flexible and indirect technologies of government, neoliberalism transforms our society into an enterprise society oriented by the dynamics of economic competition, whereby today any return to Adorno's theory would not only misplace the real target, but would also share the inflationary mode of critique marking neoliberalism's questionable "phobia of the state".

The results of my comparison of Adorno's and Foucault's critical diagnoses of modern Western societies, therefore, were twofold: on the one hand, I illustrated the remarkable compatibility of their material concerns about the deep entanglement of the rationality of prevailing social practices with dangerous forms of power shaping and orienting the ways subjects experience themselves and the world they live in. On the other, and more importantly, I showed the greater acuity and empirical richness of a bottom-up, pluralist, regional, and non-judgemental approach to the question of power like Foucault's one vis-à-vis the global, top-down, moralizing, and ultimately reductionist conception espoused by Adorno, while at the same time clarifying that the relevance of the latter's analyses remains largely restricted to the processes of socialization characterizing the welfare state in the first half of the 20th century.

Turning to the anticipatory-reconstructive side of their projects, it is my contention that the theoretical and political advantages of Adorno's and Foucault's critical histories of the present over contemporary neo-Idealist theories of social action are not limited to the explanatory-diagnostic force of their arguments, but they also pertain to their pictures of social criticism. Indeed, the emphasis neo-Idealist thinkers place on the constitution of subjectivity and consciousness by epistemic and symbolic forms of action leads them to privilege an excessively cognitively centred modality of social criticism. To employ Chari's words, the latter indicates "a critical procedure that is not focused on the embodiment of critique", its affective and experiential

dimension, "but instead appeals to rationality, conceptuality, and thought at a discursive level alone"[7], thereby remaining inadequate for devising practical modes of resistance against the biopolitical techniques of power I discussed in the first two chapters. To the contrary, Chapter 3 clarified that Adorno's and Foucault's critical strategies have a common intention: by revealing how the present emerges from a complex array of historical conditions, they aspire to produce the critical distance necessary to call into question the allegedly necessary and universal limits constraining the forms of our experience, thereby opening up lines of fragility and tension within the dominant structures of power-knowledge. To this end, bridging the gap between rational argumentation and somatically, practically, and experientially engaged critique, Adorno and Foucault endorse a partisan mode of critical and self-critical inquiry that can be described as a genealogical problematization of the present, whose success hangs upon its ability to provoke a modification in the affective dimension of their addressees as well as in the way they experience themselves and the reality in which they are enmeshed. This shocking change of perspective, in fact, is that which enables them not only to recognize the contingency and arbitrariness of the social practices and normative commitments shaping their lives, but also to chart emancipatory paths of radical social transformation starting from the resources lodged in our culture. Still, despite this proximity, my comparison of Adorno's method of natural history with Foucault's genealogical approach also pointed out a remarkable difference between the targets of their critique.

Finding its point of departure in the riddle-like configuration of our reified reality as it is reproduced in the dialectical analysis of the conceptual contradictions of the object under examination, Adorno's method of natural history seeks to unearth the

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[7] Chari, *A Political Economy of the Senses*, p. 167.

meaning of these contradictions by reconstructing the non-conceptual, socio-historical experience of their original context of emergence. The result is an interpretative procedure that prompts in the reader's own body an affective cognition of the object as expressing the damage experience undergoes through the mechanisms of repression of nature characterizing the subordination of modern disenchantment to the spellbound principle of unreflected self-preservation, whereby the world stands revealed as the source of physical and psychological suffering that demands to be eradicated through revolutionary praxis. In this sense, piercing through the false veil of our conceptually reified practices by way of a constellative use of historical materials, Adorno's goal is to emancipate us from our condition of ideological captivity, according to which the delusionary and self-legitimizing narrative of capitalist modernity covers up the material and psychological dynamics that his speculative and mono-explanatory account reads as the hidden driving forces behind the development of Western civilisation.

As I showed above, instead, the target of Foucault's genealogy is represented by our condition of "aspectival captivity" to the horizon of intelligibility for thought and action defined by the modern regime of truth, which derives from the structural enmeshing between the techniques of biopolitical government and the system of knowledge of human sciences. Foucault's *histoire fiction*, in fact, intends to bring to light the contingent effects of prescription and veridiction associated with the rationalities guiding our practices by way of a series of inquiries into the conditions that have made them acceptable as possible responses to certain historically specific problematizations, whose emergence is the outcome of the difficulties and impasses faced by previous equally contingent practices. Unlike in Adorno's case, this means that the object of Foucault's critique is not some unconscious, secret agency of

history that would have a distinct nature from what it determines, but rather the "depth knowledge [*savoir*] and depth power [*pouvoir*]"[8] that condition the way we do what we do: disrupting the familiarity and naturalness of our present practices, Foucault operates an act of displacement of his addressees' threshold of tolerance that makes visible the dangers intrinsic in the problematizations shaping the seemingly unsurpassable boundaries of our modern historical a priori, thereby creating a space of freedom for the experimentation of alternative, transformative solutions to these very same problematizations.

Nevertheless, Chapter 3 left one question pending, namely whether Adorno and Foucault are normatively justified to make their critical claims. Rejecting the view that they lack normative theorizing, the issue was addressed in Chapter 4, where I offered a careful appraisal of their normative strategies. What first appeared from this confrontation is their glaring dissimilarity, which reflects the opposite attitudes behind Adorno's and Foucault's pictures of our modern social world.

The pessimism underlying Adorno's substantial and epistemic negativism leads him to endorse a form of metaethical negativism, whose deeper rationale has been traced by recent interpreters in an Aristotelian conception of normativity. Declaring justificatory accounts of normativity superfluous and outrageous, Adorno employs his method of natural history to foster in the reader a somatic impulse of revulsion against the suffering and pain brought about by the socio-historical conditions of late capitalism as the ultimate stage of the regressive tendency marking the course of Western civilisation. The objective badness expressed in this affective experience provide sufficient reasons not only to convict our social world for failing to ensure basic human functioning, but also to demand its radical change, without any appeal to

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[8] Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique*, p. 33.

a notion of the good or right state of affairs. As I argued, however, such an account represents only a partial solution to the normativity problem raised by Adorno's philosophy. To reinstate an earlier point, unless Adorno is able to demonstrate (and he is not) that is deep pessimism is warranted, the normativity problem and the solution he advances for it are just unnecessary limitations that sap the critical power of theory.

In contrast to Adorno's pessimism, the premise of Foucault's critical philosophy is a postulate of absolute optimism. According to the latter, Foucault identifies the interpretative-evaluative perspective guiding his archaeo-genealogical reflections with a normative orientation directed to the promotion of freedom as self-transformation. Insofar as he is able to show how the dangerous entanglement of the discourse of humanism with modern biopower has come to assemble a regime of aspectival captivity that shapes the putatively universal and necessary bounds of our experience as free agents, Foucault allows us to recognize that we are ethically and politically motivated to engage in practices of resistance against these intolerable forms of subjection, which entails not only the problematization of the contingent practices constitutive of our present, but also self-transformative responses directed at fashioning new modes of life with a minimum of domination. Far from appealing to normative justifications in terms of universal reasons articulated in discursive claims, therefore, Foucault's genealogy derives its normative authority from its capacity to embody the *ethos* of freedom underpinning his picture of critique in his own biographical engagements with power and, more importantly, in the creation of new diagnostic tools geared to break the epistemological grammar of the humanist regime of truth, a theoretical operation that exemplifies the politics of struggle against modernity's political double bind Foucault seeks to facilitate through his work.

Despite the divergence between their normative strategies at a first-order level, however, my claim was that Adorno and Foucault have a shared normative goal. Contrary to what has been often assumed, their critical histories of the present are not meant to reject modernity's normative ideals. Rather, by problematizing the imbrication of our fundamental values with relations of power, Adorno and Foucault elaborate an immanent critique of modernity, which seeks to transcend the normative commitments of Enlightenment modernity so as to foster a better realization of our freedom in a radically different and unknowable future.

Now, as I clarified, for Adorno and Foucault the advent of this future requires a radical transformation of the existing social order, which depends upon the disclosure of real possibilities of emancipation within the present reality. The point of Chapter 5, therefore, was to examine the effective practices of resistance Adorno and Foucault advocate in order to give further concretion to these possibilities. To this end, after pointing out the affinities characterizing their respective appraisals of the political role of critique as a destabilizing and non-prescriptive activity, I developed a comparison between Adorno's minimal portrait of a suspended life and Foucault's reflections on a progressive politics of resistance.

Such a confrontation enabled me to demonstrate the serious limitations of Adorno's ethics of resistance, which derive from its reliance upon his questionable doctrine of austere negativism. According to the latter, in fact, the all-powerful domination exerted by the capitalist exchange totality embroils us so deeply in the wrongness of our context of delusion that whatever we can do as individuals fails to discharge the currently over-demanding imperative of producing the social change necessary for morality to become actual. But if the current social arrangement negates individuals' capacity for positive freedom as the indispensable pre-condition of moral action,

Adorno admits that individuals can still exercise their negative freedom and try to live as decently as they can by engaging in resistant practices of non-cooperation as well as acts of protest against and preventive reform of our totally administered society. Premised upon a feeling a emphatic solidarity with other's people suffering, the goal of these practices is not only to avoid the worst (i.e. the recurrence of Auschwitz or similar events) and minimize our involvement in the badness of our social world, but also to rule out any obstacle that might prevent the emergence of a future humanity as the only subject capable of fostering the transition to a truly reconciled, utopian society, where the increase of general wealth and the satisfaction of needs would go hand in hand with the fearless proliferation of processes of "differentiation without domination" and the abolition of suffering (at least in its senseless, and maybe historically superfluous, forms).[9] However, as I argued above, Adorno's theory lacks the theoretical and political mediations necessary to articulate how this global subject is supposed make its appearance from within a social setting that he describes as characterized by the ever-increasing power and resilience of late capitalism. Even if one were ready to grant validity to his dubious idea that the dialectic of progress ensures the material conditions for the realization of human beings' potential in a reconciled state of affairs, in fact, the defensive and reactive character of the practices of resistance Adorno recommends seems to make it illusionary to hope that a spontaneous and unplanned transformation will finally restore the possibility of revolutionary praxis. Adorno should have rather explained how the global subject he champions might result from the scaling-up of practices of solidarity with the progressive objectives of organized forms of collective political struggle aspiring to

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[9] Adorno, "Subject and Object", p. 140. For a helpful discussion of Adorno's idea of the abolition of suffering in the utopian society, see Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy*, pp. 145–49. It would be very interesting to confront the fragmented but significant outlines of a radically alternative, future community Adorno and Foucault put forward. Unfortunately, due to space constraints, I have to leave this comparison for another occasion.

overthrow exchange society. In place of such an explanation, instead, Adorno unilaterally condemns existing collective actions for their conformist regression into blind pseudo-activities destined to entrench the dominant ideology and support the return of fascist patterns of behaviour. As a result, pinning his hopes on the few remaining bourgeois individuals, Adorno is driven to identify the last bulwark against the integrative pressures of the social totality in the consciousness-raising and immunising functions of theory, whose primacy risks limiting the role of resistance to the critique of the forms of false-consciousness masking the objective tendencies towards re-barbarization.

These shortcomings induced me to ask whether one can find more promising resources for resistance in Foucault's work. In order to display that this is actually the case, I began by emphasising the difference between the points of departure of Adorno's and Foucault's analyses. Whereas Adorno's micrological studies seeks to illuminate the almost perfect adhesion of social life to the all-encompassing logic of capitalist reification, for Foucault the relational nature of power entails that it is always intrinsically confronted by local, mobile, and productive tactics of resistance, whose strategic concatenation might be able to thwart not only the power-knowledge apparatuses they directly oppose, but also their over-all system of coordination. Accordingly, against Adorno's totalizing conception of the transition to a post-capitalist society, Foucault can claim that radical change does not amount to an unmediated and exceptional shift, but rather results from the strategic conjoining of multiple, regional practices of resistance inherent in power relations. As I demonstrated, however, the crucial advantage of Foucault's proposal lies elsewhere, namely in the creative nature of the practices of resistance his genealogical inquiries seek to promote. Far from being restricted to acts of negation, subtraction or

mitigation of our participation in the wrongness of the modern social world as it is still the case in Adorno, for Foucault, resistance should assume the form of a strategic attack levelled against the modern power-knowledge regimes through the construction of new cultural forms and styles of existence, which cannot be captured within the social order of possibilities disclosed by the governmental technologies of biopolitics. Such an conception is already evident in his genealogical writings of the mid-1970s: the well-known reference to bodies and pleasures, for instance, invites us to experiment with a different economy of lived bodies that would constitute a kind of counter-truth with respect to the sex-desire couple at the basis of the modern *dispositif* of sexuality, thereby freeing us from our unchallenged adherence to its normalizing truths. Still, it is in Foucault's later works that his notion of resistance finds its most substantial thematization. The redefinition of power as government associated with the shift from his earlier, almost exclusive focus on techniques of domination to the study of their interaction with technologies of the self enables Foucault to reformulate resistance in terms of a strategic counter-conduct geared to open up the space for individuals to engage in practices of freedom, whereby its effectiveness consists in its ability to produce alternative modes of subjectivation capable of sabotaging the mechanisms of the government by individuation characterizing modern state power. Accordingly, I proposed to read Foucault's later ethical inquiries into the Hellenistic and Roman practices of care of the self as the source of what can be called a "politics of the governed", which might constitute effective modes of resistance against the dangerous forms of subjec(tiva)tion fostered by the contemporary technologies of liberal and neoliberal government. To put it in a nutshell, if the latter target individuals' free conduct so as to prompt the self-fashioning of governable subjects marked by their biological and economic

productivity, what captures Foucault's attention in the spiritual exercises of the Hellenistic and Roman antiquity is a set of technologies for the care of the self accessible to everyone, which enable the acquisition of the ethical distance necessary to assume life itself as a reflexive object of problematization and engage in an etho-poetic work of transfiguration that modifies the relationship individuals maintain to themselves, the others, and their world. As Foucault contends, in fact, their continuity with the modern techniques of subjection hints at the possibility of a different (re-) actualization of these self-technologies as the political instruments of an "art of not living thusly", a creative practice of desubjection that might foster an unexpected transformation of the governmental *dispositifs* of modern power from within our historical a priori. In this sense, it seems that Foucault is again better placed to respond to the ethico-political challenges we face: whereas the neoliberal art of government can easily co-opt the reactive forms of resistance Adorno vouches for as already contemplated possibilities of behaviour within the marketized terrain of global capitalist economy, Foucault's conception of resistance invites us to problematize the historical conditions at the basis of our modes of subjectivation in order to stimulate the invention of radically different truths, whose experimentation might finally emancipate us from our regime of aspectival captivity.

To conclude my comparative appraisal of Adorno's and Foucault's potential contributions to the renaissance of critical theory as a valid political project, therefore, we can finally see that the best way forward is not to go back to the strictures of Adorno's negativistic philosophy with all the anachronistic consequences this return would entail, but rather to take up Foucault's optimistic attitude in the attempt to construct a critical ontology of the present that draws on its more effective diagnostic and reconstructive tools. Perhaps, using a metaphor, one can say that the

future of critical theory depends upon its willingness to embark upon a journey, which from gloomy Frankfurt leads it to cross the Rhine and eventually reach the lights of Paris.

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