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# Transient Constellations: Adorno, Benjamin, and the Actuality of Idealism

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# Abstract

This dissertation examines the thought of Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin in critical constellation with German Idealism, specifically G.W.F. Hegel and F.W.J. Schelling. I explore how Adorno and Benjamin deconstruct and refashion Idealist notions, while also providing the post-Idealist theoretical armature to read Idealism in speculative directions. Through this mosaic, I pose questions regarding the actuality of philosophy, considering how thought might open itself towards a fuller spectrum of experience, while nonetheless remaining systematic, creating new (inter)disciplinary models of philosophy which tarry with the para-philosophical domains of art and nature. In the first part of this project, I provide a critical exegesis of Adorno, whom I locate as a fundamentally "post-Idealist" thinker, one who works through, while extending, German Idealism's central problematics. I elaborate Adorno's impossible hope for philosophy in relation to crisis, elaborating ruin, conflict, and "natural history" as the motivating elements of Adorno's negative dialectic. I then survey Adorno's contestation of philosophy's absolute autarky by way of disciplinary conflicts with sociology and psychoanalysis, along with the ur-conflict Adorno opens between philosophy and art-aesthetics. The second part of this project takes up the early writings of Benjamin (~1928), whom I position as elaborating an expanded, though nonetheless transcendental, philosophy of experience via a meta-critical expansion of the Kantian program into the domain of language (which comes to be understood in a mimetic and medial sense). Though Benjamin's attempts to found a novel "coming philosophy" began with Kant, the limitations of the (neo) Kantian epistemic conception of philosophy led Benjamin to enter the "force-field" of post-Kantian Idealism, developing his own mortuary romantic conception of philosophy, via the speculative potentiation of the *Frühromantiker,* Goethe, and the Baroque poets. In summation, I present a reading of Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* centering on notions of allegory and natural history, ideas which provide the foundational contours of his natural-historical philosophy of transience. Part three of this project takes up the work of Schelling and Hegel respectively, thinkers whom I read "without absolutes," that is, as theorists that problematize the final unity of philosophy by way of nature and aesthetics. I explore Schelling as a thinker for whom the "original diremption" of nature continually troubles the constancy of thought, resulting in a negative dialectical mode of organization in which autonomous members threaten any possible philosophical system. My final chapter elaborates my own ruined reading of Hegel, which methodologically follows the (Hegelian) interventions of Bataille. I elevate nature and aesthetics as "phantasmatic domains"—or prisms—which can be employed to productively refract the Hegelian program, reading his (supposedly) panlogicist corpus against the grain.

Keywords: Frankfurt School, German Idealism, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, G.W.F. Hegel, F.W.J. Schelling.

## Summary for a Lay Audience

How might philosophy—along with the humanities more broadly— help us think about ourselves and our time in provocative, imaginative, and speculative ways? Amid current crises of ecology, politics, and economy, and as the world returns to a "new normal," what might philosophy and its history teach us about our existential situation along with our possible relationships to the (natural) world?  This dissertation considers such questions by way of the writings of Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) and Theodor W. Adorno (1903-1969), thought in constellation with German Idealism, specifically G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831) and F.W.J. Schelling (1775-1854). In interrogating the "actuality" of philosophy, these thinkers question the proper form and purview of philosophy, considering philosophy's relationship to other disciplines and para-philosophical domains such as aesthetics and nature (Hegel, *PS,* 27; Adorno, *AP,* 120, 126-7). For these theorists, to think following crisis entails fracturing philosophy in new modern directions, considering modes of intellectual grounding that allow philosophy to be opened towards the plethora of possible "experiences." These thinkers envision open models of rationality, seeing philosophy as an interdisciplinary dialogue that continually tarries with insights from other spheres. This dissertation, *Transient Constellations: Adorno, Benjamin, and the Actuality of Idealism*, examines the modes by which the twentieth-century Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School poses questions of philosophy's actuality anew. Taking up and rethinking German Idealism's tendency to form overarching philosophical systems, the Frankfurt School allows the humanities to be thought in new critical and interdisciplinary directions. This allows one to consider the relation between "the system" and categories such as nature, history, art, and experience. Further, does the Idealist architectonic, as it is expressed in thinkers like Hegel, necessarily have a panlogicist "dominating character," or can it be refashioned for critical purposes (Adorno, *ND* 26-28; *AT,* 64- 65)? How might the humanities relate themselves to nature and the physical sciences differently? This dissertation places German Idealism—an interdisciplinary and speculative model of thought—in constellation with Benjamin and Adorno, examining how the latter intervene upon, and amend, Idealist categories through considerations of history, nature ("natural history"), art and aesthetics, experience, and their very style of philosophizing. Such engagements allow Benjamin and Adorno to forward their own "coming philosophy": a critical interdisciplinary model for the humanities based on a new relationship to history, experience, and the (natural) world.

# Acknowledgments

It's been a prevalent notion. Fallen sparks. Fragments of vessels broken at the Creation. And someday, somehow, before the end, a gathering back to home. A messenger from the Kingdom, arriving at the last moment. But I tell you there is no such message, no such home—only the millions of last moments . . . nothing more. Our history is an aggregate of last moments.

Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow,* 151.

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## Abbreviations of Frequently Cited Works

*(A)* Hegel, G.W.F. *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art.* Vol. 1.

*(AT)* Adorno, Theodor W. *Aesthetic Theory.*

*(AP)* Adorno, Theodor W. "The Actuality of Philosophy."

*(AW)* Schelling, F.W.J. *The Ages of the World (1815).*

*(BC)* Benjamin, Walter. *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin: 1910-40.*

*(CM)* Adorno, Theodor W. *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords.*

*(CPJ*) Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of the Power of Judgment.*

*(CPR)* Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason.*

*(DE)* Horkheimer, Max and Theodor W. Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments.*

*(EL)* Hegel, G.W.F. *The Encyclopedia Logic: Part 1 of the Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze.*

*(EO)* Hegel, G.W.F. *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline and Critical Writings.*

*(FE)* Schelling, F.W.J. *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom.*

*(FO)* Schelling, F.W.J. *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature.*

*(MM)* Adorno, Theodor W. *Minima Moralia*,

*(ND)* Adorno, Theodor. *Negative Dialectics.* For German clarification I employ the same abbreviation separated from the English by //

*(NH)* Adorno, Theodor W. The Idea of Natural History."

*(NL I)* Adorno, Theodor W. *Notes to Literature. Vol. 1.*

*(NL II)* Adorno, Theodor W. *Notes to Literature. Vol. 2.*

*(OT*) Benjamin, Walter. *Origin of the German Trauerspiel.*

*(PN)* Hegel, G.W.F. *Hegel's Philosophy of Nature: Part Two of the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences.*

*(PS)* Hegel, G.W.F. *Phenomenology of Spirit.* Frequently I refer to the German text, *Phänomenologie des Geistes,* which I abbreviate as *(PG)*.

*(SOL)* Hegel, G.W.F. *The Science of Logic.*

*(STI*) Schelling, F.W.J. *The System of Transcendental Idealism (1800).*

*(US*) Schelling, F.W.J. *On University Studies.*

*(SW 1)* Benjamin, Walter. *Selected Writings: Volume 1, 1913-1926.*

*(SW 2)* Benjamin, Walter. *Selected Writings: Volume 2, 1927-1934.*

*(SW 3*) Benjamin, Walter**.** *Selected Writings: Volume 3, 1935-1938.*

*(SW 4)* Benjamin, Walter. *Selected Writings: Volume 4, 1938-1940.*

For German clarifications from Benjamin and Adorno's *Gesammelte Schriften* I employ *(GS*). For references to Benjamin's writings, I follow the convention in Benjamin studies of providing the volume, followed by page number in each citation ex. (*SW 4:* 392). I follow the same convention for Adorno's collected essays.

## *Preface: Crisis and Philosophy*

In the "Preface" to his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807)—supposedly written as the conquering Napoleon arrived in Jena—Hegel asserts, "ours is a birth time and a period of transition to a new era," a modern age awakes in which "Spirit has broken with the world it has hitherto inhabited and imagined" (*PS,* 6). Hegel calls upon philosophy to become "actual" for this new modern era, taking the Kantian imperative of enlightenment upon itself, such that "it can lay aside the title of 'love of knowing' and be *actual* knowing," and "philosophy can be made serious business" (*PS*, 27, 41). For Hegel, "actuality" [*Wirklichkeit*] is opposed to "reality" [*Realität*] and should be thought in terms of the Aristotelean distinction between "potentiality" and "actuality," whereby becoming "actual" entails an entity coming to embody its form (*SOL,* 478-488; *EL,* 213-35). To become "actual" necessitates philosophy becoming worthy of itself, living up to its own form, becoming "mature," and learning to speak its own language. Following Kant's imperatives for enlightenment, philosophy must "dare to know":  heroically employing its voice in public, dispensing with a reliance on previous forms ("Enlightenment," 54-55). Hegel challenges and expands Kant's imperatives, providing what Adorno later termed an "enlightened critique of enlightenment," daring to think the project of enlightenment in terms of a general economy, meta-critically extending philosophy in an immanent reflection of reason upon itself (*DE,* xvii-xix). This movement, of the immanent self-reflective reflection of philosophy, or "meta-critique," is one of the fundamental motifs of German Idealism (Beiser, *Fate,* 4-7) and is enacted in various ways by all the thinkers in this project—theorists who continually expand, while reflecting upon, the "infinite" project of enlightenment (Kant, "Enlightenment," 57).

Hegel saw the tumult and upheavals of his age as occasions for the critical renewal of thought: The French Revolution (and the resulting Terror) overturned previous political assumptions, providing an imaginative horizon for novel political theorization, while new advances in the physical and social sciences delivered a catalyst for a new "modern" mode of "rational" thought (Comay, *Mourning,* 1-14; Marcuse, *Reason,* 3-16; Pinkard, *Hegel,* 23-26). Though he is modern, Hegel is not one of Benjamin's avant-garde "new constructors" who sought to dispense with the auras of

tradition wholesale (*SW 2:* 733). Instead, Hegel carefully undertook a critical excavation of the ruins of previous philosophical forms, arranging them in a historical mosaic as precursors in the development of his own modern system of thought. Philosophy must emerge from the previous forms which it nonetheless conducted its formative *Bildung* within: "like a phoenix from the ashes" (*PN,* 444-5). Despite their apparent developmental or panlogicist character, Hegel's texts remain fragmentary "ruins." Although Hegel wants to herald in a new modern mode of thought, he is also an intellectual hoarder. Hegel is one who "lingers" and cannot let go of certain forms of life; even when they are supposedly passed: "Hegel cannot decide when the past is past" (Rajan, Writing," 140). This tension, between moving on and lingering, is encapsulated by the Hegelian notion of "*Aufhebung*" ("sublation"), which means at once destruction, along with preservation as something higher.

Continuing this Hegelian "darkening of enlightenment," two years later (in 1809), and deeply marred by disaster and ruin following the death of his wife Caroline Schlegel, Schelling penned his *Freedom* essay, commencing the period of his "middle work," which sought to probe of the metaphysical abysses of both nature and *Spirit* (Lyotard, *Heidegger,* 5; Rajan, *Deconstruction,* 130). Schelling's middle corpus attempted to reckon with the "deep melancholy spread over all life," such that "one might say that the Godhead sits enthroned over a world of terrors" (*FE,* 63; *WA,* 49). In elaborating such a "tension between system and life," Schelling makes crisis, or negativity, the animating force of philosophy (Snow, 3). Such a diremptive understanding of thought is echoed in his 1821 "On the Nature of Philosophy as Science," which describes the history of philosophy in terms of an "asytasy" or "chaos": a resistance to system that is manifest throughout previous forms of thought (210-1). With Schelling's embrace of struggle, the freedom of enlightenment is no longer understood as some optimistic unfolding of providence, but an "abyss" which threatens to engulf philosophy, and with it, any stable notion of the philosophical subject.

Schelling's work likewise registers the shocks to philosophy dealt by the French Revolution, along with the advances in the life sciences, considering insights from the emergent disciplines of biology and chemistry in relation to philosophy, all in an attempt to create an organic model of philosophy, one able to express the "original duality" of the natural and spiritual worlds (*FO,* 88-9). Schelling's transference of strife into the

heart of the absolute has troubling consequences for any possible philosophy of *Spirit*, and throughout Schelling's middle work, the autogenetic pathologies of this absolute duality continually erupt, overcoming any attempt at philosophical closure. Schelling forces philosophy into a dialogue with its abject and unconscious moments, fracturing and opening thought in relation to crisis.

A century later, Benjamin interrogates the (systematic) possibility of philosophy in relation to Modernity, diagnosing a multifarious crisis of "experience," which in the modern context "has fallen in value" (*SW 3:* 143). Hitherto, philosophy had neglected the ephemeral and singular nature of experience in favour of the generalizable level of the concept (as in Kant), and Benjamin's early writings sought to programmatically develop new models of "absolute experience": "deduced in a systematic, symbolic framework as language" (*SW 1:* 96). The crises of Modernity provided philosophy with a Nietzschean "second innocence," an opportunity to "start from scratch...to make a little go along way," embracing new avant-garde models and methods of thought, opening philosophy towards a plethora of new experiences and domains (*SW* 2: 733).

Despite the optimism of his avant-garde programs, Benjamin should be considered a thinker of failure. From the miscarriages of his *Habilitation* on Baroque *Trauerspiel,* to his inability to "finish" his magnum opus (*The Arcades Project),* along with his many botched attempts at marriage and friendship, and untimely death (in 1940). Benjamin the melancholic is one who emphatically dwelled under the "sign of Saturn," affirming ruin and transience (*OT,* 152-6). Failure is not simply a predicate with which to describe the enigmatic Benjamin, but rather, provides the proper allegorical intuition through which to illuminate the ornate contours of his transient metaphysics of natural history. Benjamin describes the Baroque playwrights as creating not plays, but "ruins": texts which deliberately hurled themselves upon the wreckage of history. Benjamin's own fragmentary texts embrace such natural-historical transience. For Benjamin, history becomes a storehouse of failed projects through which the critic-philosopher is able to sift, taking up the utopian impulses of the past in constellation with their present via their "weak messianic" power (*SW 4:* 390).

In his 1960s writings, in the wake of the horrors of the Second World War, and as the world seemed poised to lapse into further conflict, Adorno forwards his own spectral "necrology" of philosophy with his 1966 *Negative Dialectics*: "philosophy, which once

seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realize it was missed" (*ND,* 3). After the failure to "realize" philosophy in twentieth- -century Marxism, philosophy survives its own abolition as a "vestige of freedom," providing kaleidoscopic "message[s] in a bottle," which preserve the heterotopic promise of a differential order of things (*CM,* 10; Adorno & Horkheimer, *Manifesto,* 101).[1] For Adorno, despite the failure of philosophy to shape the world by way of praxis—to "change the world" as opposed to merely "interpret[ing] it" (Marx, "Theses," 143-4) —it should not be dispensed with; instead, one must approach philosophy critically, view its history as a series of ruined models which can be refashioned in relation to the disasters of the present. According to Adorno, capitalism presents philosophy with a crisis of unique gravity, and thought must marshal the full array of its resources in response. However, Adorno's materialism does not necessitate the rejection of its Idealist basis. One must strive to think Idealism "without absolutes," that is, as a ruin, without absolute closure or final synthesis, and as a critical trove of potential philosophies of *Spirit.* Adorno figures the narrow "critical path" that remains open to the life of the mind amidst the grim political-existential horizons of late capitalism. As he writes in "Why Still Philosophy" (1963):

> Traditional philosophy's claim to totality, culminating in the thesis that the real is the rational, is indistinguishable from apologetics. But this thesis has become absurd. A philosophy that would set itself up as a total, as a system, would become a delusional system. Yet if philosophy renounces the claim to totality and no longer claims to develop out of itself the whole that should be the truth, then it comes into conflict with its entire tradition. This is the price it must pay for the fact that, once cured of its own delusional system, it denounces the delusional system of reality. No longer is it then a self-sufficient, stringent network of argumentative justification. The state of philosophy in society, which philosophy itself should scrutinize rather than deny, corresponds to its own desperate state: the necessity of formulating what nowadays under the title of 'the absurd' is already being recuperated by the machinery. After everything, the only responsible philosophy is one that no longer imagines it had the absolute at its command; indeed, philosophy must forbid the thought of it in order not to betray that thought, and at the same time it must not bargain away anything of the emphatic concept of truth. This contradiction is philosophy's element. It defines philosophy as negative. Kant's famous dictum that the critical path is the only one still open to us

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[1] Adorno describes philosophy as providing a "vestige of freedom" within the context of instrumental rationality: "If philosophy is still necessary, it is only in the way it has been from time immemorial: as critique, as resistance to the expanding heteronomy even if only as thought's powerless attempt to remain its own master and to convict of untruth, by their own criteria, both a fabricated mythology and a conniving, resigned acquiescence on the other of untruth. It is incumbent upon philosophy, as long as it is not prohibited as it was in the Christianised Athens of late antiquity, to provide a refuge for freedom." (CM, 10). As I will argue in 2.3, for Adorno, the (autonomous) work of art likewise provides such a vestige of freedom.

belongs to those propositions constituting a philosophy that proves itself because the propositions, as fragments, survive beyond the system that conceived of them. Admittedly, the idea of critique itself hearkens back to the philosophical tradition that today lies in ruins. (*CM*. 7)

Following crisis, the only "responsible" philosophy is one without absolutes, one that affirms critique, particularity, and transience against the grand unities of past systems. Philosophy must become a natural historical practice, opposing the compensatory (or "apologetic") narratives of progressive enlightenment, and denouncing the "delusional system" that is the capitalist economic ideological order (*ND,* 300-7; *NH,* 260). Adorno's thought attempts to crystalize the dissonant disasters of the twentieth-century into the very form of philosophy, and as such, his "negative dialectic" is a tragic project, one "knowingly pledged to failure," an attempt to "get outside [of philosophy] using the same conceptual language that blocks all exits" (Esposito, 8).

For Adorno, in response to the historical dissonance of the twentieth-century, philosophy— "a cause deemed obsolete and superfluous by the spirit of the ages"—can no longer be undertaken in a typically Idealist manner; it can no longer affirm holistic notions of system, or notions of the "good life" undertaken via individual *Bildung* (*CM*. 5). However, neither should philosophy uncritically adopt the new "attempted breakouts" of fundamental ontology (exemplified by Heidegger), or positivism, but rather, thought must hold to the ephemeral possibility of critique (*Lectures ND,* 65-75; *CM,* 7-12).[2] Within the reified "administered world" of capitalist exchange society, in which philosophy becomes a "specialized discipline, one purified of all specific content," one cannot reach nostalgically for a past "golden-age," attempting to make philosophy great again through some triumphant return to fundamental grounding: "Restoration is as futile in philosophy as it is anywhere else" (*CM,* 47, 6). For Adorno, philosophy lives on under the proviso that it "ruthlessly criticize[s] itself," upholding the transient ground of critique as a historical path-forward for philosophy (*ND,* 3). That is, after crisis, philosophy must work through its own history, a "post-Idealist" sentiment that animates Adorno's post-war thinking.

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[2] The positions of ontology and positivism should be seen as ideal-typical foils against which Adorno elaborates his own philosophical positions and are thus referenced in virtually all his texts. According to Adorno, both models of philosophy deny the material historical genesis of ideas, and thus ideologically uphold the status quo.

Adorno highlights "critique" as a route forward for philosophy, enlisting critical contestation as a means to move thinking onward. Critique presents "the unity of problems and arguments" and in so doing, "has laid the foundation for...the productive unity of the history of philosophy," and within such a "progressive continuity... [of] critique even those philosophers whose doctrines insist on the eternal and timeless acquired their temporal nucleus, their historical status" (*CM,* 8; *AT,* 195). Echoing Benjamin's historical-critical philosophy, criticism extracts the temporal "truth-content" of previous systems, which it crystalizes and imports into present constellations of concerns.

Despite his unrelenting pessimism as a theorist, Adorno is not a nominalist nihilist who longs for the abolition of philosophy. Adorno's model of criticism contains within itself a minimal utopian impulse and is animated by a longing for a more open and empathetic relationship between philosophy (or the subject) and the object:

> The critique of the current philosophies does not plead for the disappearance of philosophy nor for its replacement by separate disciplines such as social science. It intends both formally and materially to promote precisely that manner of intellectual freedom that had no place in the regnant philosophical movements. A thinking that approaches its objects openly, rigorously and on the basis of progressive knowledge is also free towards its objects in a sense that it refuses to have rules prescribed to it by organized knowledge. (*CM,* 13)

To preserve utopia, which for Adorno remains one of the key thoughts of German Idealism, one must think against thought, denouncing the compensatory and ideological modes of philosophy which uphold the world as it is. Adorno expresses his regulative utopianism in terms of a reconciled relationship with nature, a "free" and "open" relationship to objects that does not dominate particularity by way of subsumptive categories. Philosophy must take a step back, recognizing its minority character, along with its historical situation as a "useless" object, and in so doing it figures a vestigial image of a resolved relationship to the natural world: "Only a thinking that...acknowledges its lack of function and power can perhaps catch a glimpse of an order of the possible and the nonexistent, where human beings and things each would be in their rightful place. Because philosophy is good for nothing, it is not yet obsolete" (*CM,* 15). Philosophy returns to its minority position: because it is "good for nothing," because it is only idle speculation, philosophy is able to live on.

At the conclusion of the essay, Adorno is hopeful that philosophy could once again reclaim its genuinely speculative vocation: "Philosophy should not with foolish arrogance set about collecting information and then take a position; rather it must unrestrictedly, without recourse to some mental refuge, experience [zu *erfahren*]" (*CM*, 17; *Eingriffe,* 28). The renewal of this possibility of speculative "metaphysical experience," of the movement of philosophy beyond the purview of the concept by way of transformative events and encounters, is one of the key contributions of both Benjamin and Adorno's work. To become "actual," to become meta-critically aware of itself, philosophy must open itself to a broader array of experiences, to disciplines and domains which challenge its constitutive assumptions.

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How might philosophy—along with the humanities more broadly— help us think about ourselves and our time in provocative, imaginative, and speculative ways? Amid current crises of ecology, politics, and economy, and as the world returns to a "new normal," what might philosophy and its history teach us about our existential situation along with our possible relationships to the (natural) world?  This dissertation considers such questions by way of the writings of Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) and Theodor W. Adorno (1903-1969), thought in constellation with German Idealism, specifically G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831) and F.W.J. Schelling (1775-1854). In interrogating the "actuality" of philosophy, these thinkers question the proper form and purview of philosophy, considering philosophy's relationship to other disciplines and para-philosophical domains such as aesthetics and nature (Hegel, *PS,* 27; Adorno, *AP,* 120, 126-7). For these theorists, to think following crisis entails fracturing philosophy in new modern directions, considering modes of intellectual grounding that allow philosophy to be opened towards the plethora of possible "experiences." These thinkers envision open models of rationality, seeing philosophy as an interdisciplinary dialogue that continually tarries with insights from other spheres.

As thinkers of "*Spirit*" [*Geist*], all four theorists understand philosophy in a holistic and encompassing sense, refusing to limit reason to any single faculty or discipline; instead, they work to theorize philosophy in a speculative and

interdisciplinary manner (Cassirer, 865-7).[3] As Benjamin programmatically asserts, the task of a future "coming philosophy" necessitates the systematic articulation of the full spectrum of "experiences" [*Erfahrungen*], beyond the narrow sphere of "possible experience" permitted by Kant (*SW 1*: 100-10).[4] Such a program is enacted in various, though overlapping, ways by all the thinkers examined in this project; Hegel, Schelling, and Adorno facilitate a porous (though oftentimes contestatory) interaction between philosophy and other disciplines, philosophizing *with* nature, art-aesthetics, history, experience, and theology, allowing such marginal domains the ability to deterritorialize philosophy. For this constellation of thinkers, to consider philosophy as "actual" entails an opening of philosophy (or *Spirit*) to a broader range of experiences, considering how they might fit within, or upset, the stability of the philosophical system. As such, these thinkers participate in an (un)timely interrogation of the "humanities of tomorrow," imagining ways in which the humanities (and social sciences) can continue the "infinite task" of enlightenment amidst current catastrophes (Derrida*, University* 24; Kant, "Enlightenment," 57).

The following project is a response to a problematically narrow contemporary understanding of "philosophy" as a discipline (particularly in the Anglosphere), along with the more general reified vision of the university, with its disciplinary silos and facile mission statements of "excellence" and "global learning" (Readings, 3, 11-14, 21-

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[3] The German *"Geist"* connotes at once "mind" or "intellect," along with the more objective-normative domain of "spirit": "the 'I' that is 'We,' and the 'We' that is' I'" (Hegel, *PS,* 110). The term is employed throughout Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (1807): a text which describes the differing manifestations of spirit throughout history as it progresses to more refined forms of self-awareness. For Magee, spirit describes something akin to "human nature," the "unique form of consciousness posed by human beings", which can be thought both in terms of individual consciousness and objective social-normative structures (226, 227-8, 168-75). I employ the English "*Spirit*" to refer to the German "*Geist"* throughout this project.
[4] *Erfahrung* in German connotes a more durational form of experience, in which one is said to have "had an experience," to have located a particular event within a larger narrative, context, or story. Following Benjamin, I emphasize the linguistic-narrative elements of such durational experiences, in specific relation to one's "ability to share experience [*Erfahrung*]" (*SW 3:* 143; *GS II:* 438). *Fahren,* in German means "to travel," a further valence contained in the term. *Erfahrung* is opposed to the more immediate, lived "*Erlebnis*": instant everyday experiences of life that one has on a daily basis. According to Jay, "*Erlebnis* contains the root for life (*Leben*) and is sometimes translated as 'lived experience'... [and] is often taken to imply a primitive unity prior to any differentiation or objectification... located in the "everyday world" (the *Lebenswelt*)" (11). Benjamin describes Modernity as an epoch in which "Experience [in the sense of *Erfahrung*] has fallen in value," an era in which standardized "information" has replaced meaningful experiences [*Erfahrungen*], or "the ability to tell a story"; that is, traditional duration forms of experience [*Erfahrung*] have been eradicated in favour of the reproducible shock experience of everyday life [*Erlebnis*] (*SW 3:* 143; *GS II:* 438; see further, Jay, *Songs of Experience,* 329, 334-7, 340-1, 347).

43). The speculative and imaginative character of Adorno, Benjamin, Schelling and Hegel emerges more forcefully within such a bleak disciplinary context, and against the current backdrop of capitalist social relations, which further serves to foreclose imagination, while bolstering the positivist deferral to the authority of the physical sciences. Within the current phase of capitalism there is immense pressure to simply conform and cynically accept the status quo: one feels increasingly subjected to what Adorno termed "the spell" of the capitalist order of things, a "second nature" of "self-evident natural laws" which stifles the imagination, presenting one with a world of alienated conventions, against which one is seemingly impotent to act (*ND,* 316, 345-6; *CM,* 13; Lukács, *Novel,* 63-4; Marx, *Capital,* 899). As Mark Fischer has aptly articulated, such a "capitalist realism" structures the fantasy space of one's desires such that it becomes easier to imagine an apocalyptic catastrophe (what Fisher terms "the end of the world"), rather than a change in the political economic order— "the end of capitalism" (1-12, 16-21). These sentiments are mirrored in the Hegelian Marxism of the early Lukács, for whom such a brutal realism is the logical conclusion of the life-world of capitalism run amuck: a world which appears "reified" [*Verdinglichung*]—literally made to appear "thing-like"—due to the compensatory conventions of "bourgeois thought," modes of thought which occlude the historical nature of the world (Lukács, *Consciousness,* 110-147). Capitalism makes genetic categories appear as a "second nature": a mythological domain un-malleable by human thought or action (Lukács, *Novel,* 64).[5]

     This generalized reification of social relations—or with Adorno, the

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[5] Such an ideological transformation in the structure of power can also be understood in the terminology of Deleuze (of "New Societies of Control"), who describes new systems of control as simultaneously "liberating and enslaving" (4), creating a smooth or "modulating" (5-6) network of control, in which power is no longer simply disciplinary (as in Foucault's "old economy of power" 23-31, 219-28), but permissive, enabling new forms of freedom which in reality exacerbate one's subservience. In a similar manner, for Foucault, in *The History of Sexuality,* sexual emancipation is not *de facto* emancipatory unless one considers (genealogically) the meshes of power subtending such subject positions (4-13, 18-20, 44-49). Such critiques of ideology should further be supplemented via Žižek, who describes twenty-first century ideology as "cynical," in that—contra the conventional Marxist model of "false-consciousness," which sees domination in a negative sense, as the "super-structural" manifestation of class oppression –it operates through a structuration of one's fantasy space, through an inscription of "the real" itself, conditioning the possibility of how we imagine, dream, and consider to be possible (*Sublime,* 24-33). That is, ideology functions at the very moment in which one cynically imagines oneself to be outside of it, existing in some "post-ideological" end of history. In reality, *Capital* continues to deeply structure the space of one's dreams and desires.

pervasiveness of "identity thinking" (*ND,* 11-12)—has foreclosed any genuine exchange between the various faculties of knowledge, scuttling the possibility of a shared vision for the humanities, or the continuation of the university's inaugural projects of enlightenment and emancipation. The university has become organized according to what Adorno termed an "academic division of labour," a streamlined "Taylorism of the mind," or "academic industry," in which "no theory escapes the marketplace" (*DE,* 201-3; *CM,* 10; *ND,* 3-4; cf. Kant, *Conflict,* 23). As proclaimed by Benjamin, "capitalism" is a "cultic religion": a belief system in its own right, which "creates guilt, not atonement" (*SW 1:* 288-291). Capitalist mantras of efficiency, flexibility, liquidity, and globalization are worshiped for their own sake, and all other "values"—such as those espoused by the humanities—are subservient to such dogmas. Within the university, such a general "siloing" of disciplines exiles any genuine collaboration between disciplines, and when "inter-disciplinarity" is permitted, it is legitimated under neo-liberal doctrines of "innovation" or "collaboration," and with the further proviso that it does not call into question the established order of the university.

What would it mean to imagine alternative, and truly critical, models of intellectual organization? Is it still possible to imagine collective research projects organized under speculative and unconditioned headings, as opposed to their efficacy to some established aim? Could one imagine a future for philosophy which moves (even negatively via critique) beyond the atomized divisions of the contemporary intellectual environment, one which strives to philosophize in a holistic manner, incorporating insights from the physical and social sciences, along with other "spiritual" productions, such as the reception and production of art, or a diversity of other domains such as language and history? What would it mean, following Derrida, to imagine a "new humanities," along with a new university "without condition," that is, one untethered from service to the state, capital, or any established aim (*University,* 25)? To theorize after Hegel, how can philosophy move beyond "mere edification," or its service to some practical aim, to become "actual," taking up the imperative to think in a "scientific" and interdisciplinary manner (*PS,* 5-7, 27)? What would it mean to follow Schelling, who in his *On University Studies,* imagines philosophy as a guiding "vision" of the "universal and absolute" in all things (6-8), providing speculative insight into "the whole" beyond diverse strivings (8, 24-5)? Can theory promote interdisciplinary models of thought

which encourage speculative, experimental, and reflexively critical relationships between the various faculties of knowledge, while imagining alternative models of intellectual grounding and relationships to the natural world?

Within the discipline of philosophy, neoliberal market pressures have led to increased specialization, reinforcing disciplinary compartmentalization, which in turn has led to a generalized decrease in methodological inquiry: a refusal to question what philosophy is, or what it might be as a discipline. Within the market-oriented "university of excellence" (Readings, 21-43), or what could more recently be termed "Zoom university,"[6] philosophy departments seem content with their "minor" place within the diminishing humanities. Or they have come to be driven by practical aims such as "ethics," the receipt of grants, or the elucidation of technological advances: justifying the emergent fields of neuroscience and artificial intelligence. Contemporary (analytic) philosophy eschews the history of philosophy, or selectively permits historical analysis only when it fits its preconceived secular, positivist, and anti-metaphysical narrative. Philosophy is presented as some a-historical formal exercise, independent of historical genesis, or unconscious and archeological levels. Historically, according to Kant's organization of the university, the philosophy faculty should contain two departments: the first, "historical knowledge" should encompass history and the humanities more broadly (along with the natural sciences), while the second, "pure rational knowledge" or the critical domain of "pure reason," should involve pure mathematics and *a priori* philosophy, interrogating questions of "nature" and "morality" (*Conflict,* 45). It is as if contemporary philosophy refuses to acknowledge such a reciprocal relationship, wishing instead to wholly excise the "historical" genesis of knowledge, along with any serious interdisciplinary treatment of insights provided by the broader humanities, or the physical and social sciences.

The speculative and unconditioned thought of these theorists is in itself a gesture

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[6] I coin the term "Zoom University" to describe the growing technological reification of all elements of the intellectual process. Though such processes have been ongoing for much of the 20/21st century, they have been accelerated via the global pandemic and the movement of the university online. Thinkers such as Kittler have aptly described the role of medial "discourse networks" or "systems of writing" (*Aufschreibesysteme*) in shaping the communicated message, and today one might consider the extent to which our digital *Aufschreibesystem* shapes our thinking and interpolates us as subjects (see further Kittler, *Discourse,* 298, 369-72).

of resistance to the capitalist status quo. With Adorno, to think otherwise than such instrumental "identity-thinking" is a gesture of resistance: a form of *praxis* that de-reifies reality, revealing the plasticity of the world with respect to human theory and action (*AP,* 130-3; *CM,* 261). In renewing "speculative thought," philosophy becomes a space of resistance to the brute realism of the status quo (Hegel, *PS,* 36-40). Adorno compels philosophy to examine its own concepts and categories to determine those moments which ideologically entrench existing social relations, negatively elucidating the possibility that philosophy could uphold a different reality.

Instrumental conceptions of philosophy are unable to respond meaningfully to current crises. Climate catastrophe (Malm, 1-21), "Late capitalism" (Jameson, *Post-Modernism,* xxi, 1-6), "Liquid Modernity" (Bauman, 1-16), or "Burnout society" (Hann, 8-11): any way one wants to frame it, today it is self-evident that we exist in an age of multiple interrelated crises. Though it is common to herald such crises as "changing everything" (Klein, 2-65), ushering in a "new state of exception" to which theory must respond, these thinkers provide (un)timely reminders of the perpetuity of crisis: "That things are status quo *is* the catastrophe" (Benjamin, *Arcades,* 473; *SW 4:* 392). As Benjamin repeatedly reminds critical social theory: "the tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the state of emergency in which we live is not the exception, but the rule," with the task of theory being a "bring[ing] about the real state of emergency" (*SW 4:* 392). The ruin of history is continually eliciting crises which serve as new occasions for the critical renewal of thought.

External and internal crises have always presented philosophy with an opportunity, or event, for critical reflection. Roberto Esposito (in his *A Philosophy for Europe,* 2019) locates a "crisis *dispositif*" (2-4, 19-29) subtending a diverse array of twentieth century systems of thought: from the "German Philosophy" (63-108) of the Frankfurt School, through to "French Theory" (post-structuralism and deconstruction [109-154]), culminating in 1960-70s "Italian Thought" (155-200). For Esposito, "Philosophy and crisis illuminate each other, in a grip that makes one the filter for recognizing the other"; that is, political and historical crises—along with methodological predicaments internal to philosophy as a discipline—present new imperatives and

occasions for thought (4).[7]  In opening itself to existential risk in the face of crisis, philosophy is forced to tarry with its own conditions of possibility, enacting a consideration of its own limits and possibilities, along with its status as a discipline.  To follow Heidegger apropos of Hölderlin, "where the danger... grows, the saving power also" ("Technology," 340-1): the risk of crisis provides a critical event for reflection, and for the experimental renewal of philosophy.

Such a sentiment is shared by all the thinkers in this project: with Benjamin, critical historiography must "seize the past as it flashes up in a moment of danger" (*SW 4:* 391); for Adorno, the constitutive failure of philosophy, along with the historical-political crises of the twentieth century, serve as opportunities for a critical return to philosophy (*ND,* 3). The motif of "struggle" animates much of Schelling's early *Naturphilosophie* and his troubled "middle work"— "where there is no struggle there is no life" (*FE,* 63; *FO,* 18; *WA,* 90-1)—as his texts attempt to quell the ur-crisis of nature by way of the philosophical system. Likewise, for Hegel, philosophy must "win its truth...in utter dismemberment" through a protracted process of "tarrying with the negative," incorporating death and destruction into the very form of philosophy (*PS,* 18). These theorists develop "ruined" thought models, focalizing transience, non-identity, and negativity as the conflictual animus for thinking.

For all of these thinkers philosophy should not be sheltered from crisis; instead, catastrophe should be seen as the negative engine of thought. Accidents and disasters are not something to be shied away from, but rather, serve as opportunities for the critical reanimation of philosophy. In the face of crisis, none of these thinkers advocate some nostalgic or conservative return to the authority of tradition, but rather, an opening of philosophy in interdisciplinary directions, striving to incorporate a broader range of disciplines, experiences, and para-philosophical domains.

Schelling's *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom (FE)* exemplifies such an expanded and interdisciplinary model of philosophy. In the preface to the four essays that he includes with *FE* in his 1809 text, Schelling describes his aim

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[7] Describing the unique vantage of philosophy in relation to crisis, Esposito will write, "philosophy may be in a better position than other types of discourse to recognize the directions events are taking...philosophy can illuminate the contours of an era even before they have settled into a solid figure...philosophy is capable of grasping them together as a whole" (2).

as articulating "the spiritual (*Geistig*)," or "ideal" portion of his philosophy—which will chart the realm of freedom—with "complete determinateness" (4), allowing his Idealism to become "actual." This "ideal" domain emerges in tension with the "real" moment of his thought charted by *Naturphilosophie* or the "philosophy of nature" (3-4). What is essential is Schelling's movement beyond Kant's narrow "subjective Idealist" conception of reason, with its transcendental location of reason within the concepts and categories of the human subject. Instead, Schelling imagines "reason" (or philosophy) "absolutely": as interacting productively, and in a reciprocal relation, with the natural sciences, along with the range of experiences provided by history and religion.

  This constellation of theorists imagines novel relationships between philosophy and "the real," opening thought by way of the natural world and the material social realm. However, none of these thinkers privilege any pure "origin" for thought: be it the empirical domain probed by the (social) sciences, or some pure phenomenological givenness (or "sense certainty" with Hegel, *PS,* 58-66). Through this constellation, one is able to imagine new disciplinary relations for philosophy, models that place philosophy in a porous relationship with respect to other disciplines: one in which theory "burgles" insights from other domains (Adorno, *AP,* 130), allowing philosophy's concepts and categories to be contested from without, while nonetheless remaining autonomous in its own right.

  These thinkers transpose struggle and crisis into the very form of philosophy, developing self-supporting and dynamic modes of philosophical grounding. To think differently means to write differently, considering alternative and speculative formal understandings of the philosophical system. German-Idealist-Romanticism refused to shy away from such a methodological questioning of philosophy by way of its own history, continually inviting "conflict" into the heart of knowledge as a means to contest the methodological stability of thought. That is, German Idealism inaugurated a "meta-critical" reflection of "reason" upon itself (Beiser*, Reason,* 1-7), while repeatedly extending "critique" into a broader array of domains and disciplines.[8] Incorporating such

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[8] Beiser defines "meta-critique" as the unifying sentiment of "post-Kantian" philosophy (roughly between 1781-93 or the decade following the publication of Kant's *CPR*), an ethos which sets the stage for the emergence of both German Idealism and Romanticism. Broadly stated, meta-critique examines "second order" claims (with Kant's critique of the possibility of knowledge constituting the "first order"), such as

methodological dissensus into philosophy necessitates the embrace of alternative formal models: hypothetical "trial arrangements," constellations, mosaics, thought experiments, "outlines," "remarks" [*Zusätze*], models for thinking that allow individual entities to exist in themselves via identity-in-difference. Even the proto-typical "finished" works of Hegel and Schelling remain essayistic "drafts" [*Entwürfe:* "outlines," "projections"], shot through with countless additions, reconfigurations, and "speculative remarks" (that Hegel in particular added to his lecture-texts). Adorno, following Benjamin, forwards the essay as the proper form for philosophy: a model of thinking that embraces the provisional and transient as modes of intellectual organization. Both Hegel and Schelling trouble the stability of the philosophical architectonic with their organic models of philosophical grounding, coupled with the plethora of empirical detail they attempt to encyclopedically mediate. Schelling—a thinker whom Hegel chastised as continually "beginning again from the beginning" (*History 3,* 515)—embraced an essayistic and experimental mode of philosophical presentation, one in which philosophy attempts to theoretically "outline" the dynamic processes of the natural world. Likewise, Hegel's texts are continually troubled by various speculative "accidents": moments and spheres to which he allots a "separate freedom," such that they are able to threaten the static stability of thought (*PS,* 18-9). Even Hegel's finished texts seem to overrun themselves: the triumphant arrival of "absolute knowing" does not usher in some end of philosophy, but rather, affirms contingency and process, the "dash," such that philosophy is compelled to continue at its supposed "end" (Comay & Ruda, 6-8; Rajan "Encyclopedia," 7-9).

As we find ourselves blown backward into the "new normal," and as we continue to exist within the horizon of climate catastrophe, what can we imagine, or expect, for philosophy? What opportunities and challenges do our current crises of ecology, technology, economy, and politics present for philosophy? To follow Marx, this project does not propose to write "recipes for the kitchens of the future" (*Capital,* 99): to provide programmatic statements, or manifestos, as to what philosophy should be, or

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the possibility of epistemology, or more broadly, how something like metaphysics is possible (*Reason,* 1-15). I take such a notion to mean the immanent analysis of "reason" according to its own standards and categories.

how such crises should be (politically) answered. What is proposed is an indirect, or negative, consideration of our current crises in relation to Hegel, Schelling, Benjamin and Adorno. Through a reflection on these thinkers from the past, and the ways in which they understood philosophy, insight may be gained as to how philosophy might understand itself as "actual" today. As Hegel provided mediated "histories" of philosophy, experimentally employing the intellectual tradition as anticipating his own project, one can likewise conceive of the history of philosophy as a contested and experimental space through which to affect an epigenesis of philosophy (following Benjamin, *SW 4:* 389-397). The constellation of thinkers presented in this study refract a variety of divergent and imaginative possibilities as to what philosophy could be as a discipline, or practice, and can serve to renew a meta-critical interrogation of the limits and possible scope of philosophy today.

### *Introduction: On the Actuality of Philosophy*

"Philosophy is the most serious of things, but then again it is not all that serious." Adorno, *ND,* 14.

 This dissertation, *Transient Constellations: Adorno, Benjamin, and the Actuality of Idealism*, examines the modes by which the twentieth-century Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School poses questions of philosophy's actuality anew.[9] Taking up and rethinking German Idealism's tendency to form overarching philosophical systems, the Frankfurt School allows the humanities to be thought in new critical and interdisciplinary directions. This allows one to consider the relation between "the system" and categories such as nature, history, art, and experience. Further, does the Idealist architectonic, as it is expressed in thinkers like Hegel, necessarily have a panlogicist "dominating character," or can it be refashioned for critical purposes (Adorno, *ND* 26-28; *AT,* 64- 65)? How might the humanities relate themselves to nature and the physical sciences differently? This dissertation places German Idealism—an interdisciplinary and speculative model of thought—in constellation with Benjamin and Adorno, examining how the latter intervene upon, and amend, Idealist categories through considerations of history, nature ("natural history"), art and aesthetics, experience, and their very style of philosophizing. Such engagements allow Benjamin and Adorno to forward their own "coming philosophy": a critical interdisciplinary model for the humanities based on a new relationship to history, experience, and the (natural) world.

 Adorno begins his 1931 lecture, "The Actuality of Philosophy," with the assertion that philosophy must dispense with the illusion "that the power of thought is sufficient to grasp the totality of the real" (120). That is, if philosophy is to be relevant ("actual"), it

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[9] Throughout these considerations the term "Frankfurt School" will be both contested and employed. The intellectual genre grouping simultaneously connotes certain shared philosophical perspectives, relating to material social critique and interdisciplinarity, though it also denotes dissensus, a holding together of divergent intellectual research programs, such as the methodological divergences between thinkers such as Marcuse and Adorno, or Benjamin's peripheral participation. In this project, the philosophical-critical perspectives of Benjamin and Adorno will be located as the unique philosophical legacy of the "school," a view anticipated by the work of Susan Buck-Morss (*Origin,* ix-xiv, 20-3) and continued in my MA Thesis, *The Correspondence(s) of Benjamin and Adorno,* which sees the correspondence(s) between Benjamin and Adorno as inaugurating the philosophical armature of Critical Theory. I employ the term "Critical Theory" to represent the broad contours of the program of the Frankfurt School, emphasizing a self-reflexive employment of "theory" to textual and political-social objects. The term was first coined by Horkheimer, in his 1936 "Tradition and Critical Theory" (see, 188-190, 197-206, 236-43). I likewise employ "German Idealism" to encompass the thought of Hegel, Schelling, Kant and Fichte.

must no longer aim at representing the world in a final systemic manner, but rather should attempt to "distort existing reality" through the practice of critique, exposing the possibility that reality could be (constructed) otherwise (*ND,* 74). For Adorno, such a failure does not necessitate the wholesale rejection of Idealism, but rather a "working-through" of its categories via an immanent criticism that determines their historical nature and their possible critical reorientation towards contemporary concerns (Adorno, "Working," 89). Instead of striving to grasp the "totality of reality" by way of rational categories, philosophy should strive—through the creation of critical "historical trial arrangements" or constellations—to "break the spell" of the capitalist order of things, revealing the constructive possibility of alternative philosophical relationships to the world (*AP,* 131; *Adorno-Benjamin Correspondence,* 282-3; *CM,* 13; Buck-Morss, *Origin,* 25-28).

Likewise, in 1918 Benjamin asserts the task of his "coming philosophy" as the articulation of a broader notion of experience along systematic lines: an opening of the Idealist architectonic by way of "experience" and an engagement with language that creates alternative modes of thinking the philosophical system (*SW 1:* 100-10). For Benjamin, this meant rejecting traditional academic disciplines (and the university) in favour of a new model of the humanities which engaged actively with the natural sciences, history, and experience. It should be emphasized that, despite their avant-garde, or modernist proclivities, along with their experimental employments of "historical materialism," neither Benjamin nor Adorno advocate a rejection of Idealist philosophy or its central notions wholesale. Instead, both thinkers fashion experimental historical perspectives through which to read the philosophical tradition "against the grain" (*SW 4:* 392).

The relationship between German Idealism and the Frankfurt School is more complicated than it first appears, and this dissertation works to problematize simplistic models of intellectual historiography. Despite the centrality of the Germanic philosophical tradition for both Benjamin and Adorno, little scholarship in the English-speaking world has probed the complicated affinities between the two movements of thought, seemingly remaining content to rehearse conventional tropes regarding the "Marxist" basis of the Frankfurt School, along with canned derisions of Idealism as "panlogicist" or "metaphysical." As such, the "positive" understanding of philosophy

developed by both Benjamin and Adorno is generally neglected in favour of a negative image of Critical Theory, which emphasizes their destructive and avant-garde interventions upon the tradition at the expense of their respective theses for a "coming philosophy." As will be argued, Adorno's late work (*Negative Dialectics* [1966] and *Aesthetic Theory* [1969]) is squarely within the sphere of Idealism, and his writings from the 1960s provide a "post-Idealist" prism through which to reflect on the Idealist-Romantic tradition in relation to the atrophies of the twentieth-century.[10] Such a post-Idealist perspective, in which the aporias of Idealism are problematized, extended, and reflected upon, will be elevated as the overarching standpoint of this dissertation more broadly, enacted by Adorno and Benjamin, but also Hegel and Schelling through their gestures of self-critique and the speculative accidents that arise in their work.

This constellation of theorists can be read as renewing a formal methodological questioning of philosophy: a "meta-critique" in which philosophy is compelled to immanently reflect upon itself (Beiser, *Reason,* 1-15). I supplement such meta-critical notions via a Romantic hermeneutic elaborated in relation to Benjamin, whereby "critique" or "criticism" comes to mean "something objectively productive, [something] creative out of thoughtful deliberation" (*SW 1:* 142). That is, criticism should be seen on an equal footing with the object of critique, with the critic coming to be seen as the "extended author," critically supplementing the work by way of its "post-history" (*SW 1: 1:* 152-3). Benjamin and Adorno in particular (and to some extent Hegel and Schelling) renew a robust dialogue between philosophy and art, moving beyond the traditional subsumption of aesthetics to philosophical clarity. Through such critical interventions, these theorists propose new relationships between thought and the world, understood to encompass both "first" and "second" nature, or the natural world and the socio-political realm of convention. These thinkers provide methods to philosophize with the para-

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[10] Throughout these considerations, "post-Idealism" will be taken to mean a critical "working through" of the central problematics of the German Idealist-Romantic tradition (Adorno, "Working," 89-90). "Post" should not be taken in a negative sense, as the overcoming of Idealism, but rather, as the immanent meta-critical reflection on its central tenets, reflecting on notions such as freedom, "Identity, dialectic, [and] system" (Rajan, "Introduction," 14). Both Adorno and Benjamin inhabit the Idealist field of concerns, a tradition which they inherit and further problematize. Indeed, Hammer has positioned Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* as continuing the "post-Kantian problem of how freedom can be made actual" (*Modernism,* 208, 3-12); that is, Adorno continues to work through Idealist questions relating to freedom (and related questions), in a manner akin to Hegel and Schelling.

philosophical domains of nature and aesthetics, all the while renewing the critical power of thought as a means to shape reality.

German Idealism provides a "whole architecture of philosophy" (Derrida, *Points,* 212, cf. 213-5): a polyphony of models through which to conceive of the philosophical system. Both Benjamin and Adorno understand Idealism in an expanded sense, viewing it as a storehouse of thought models through which to reinvigorate thought. Beiser has aptly distinguished between the "subjective-critical Idealism" of Kant and Fichte and the "objective-absolute Idealism" of Hegel and Schelling (*Idealism,* 355-61, 554-60). "Subjective Idealism" sees reason as situated within the concepts and categories of the subject, while the latter, "absolute" form, understands reason in a broader sense, as manifesting in domains such as history, nature, and human normative structures. The critical perspectives of Adorno and Benjamin allow one to "rhizomatically" probe the ruins of previous philosophies, redeeming critical elements therein and refashioning them in the service of new thought models (Deleuze & Guattari, *Thousand,* 3-25).

These thinkers all move beyond the restricted borders of the Kantian "architectonic" understanding of philosophy, along with Kant's "subjective Idealist" conception of reason, which sought to unify experience (in terms of its "possibility") under the categories of the subject ("the transcendental unity of apperception"). This constellation deconstructs and redeploys the Kantian program, demonstrating the philosophical tradition as a contested site that can be continually read against itself. Further, I argue that German Idealism as a movement should be seen as a meta-critical working through of the Kantian program. Such meta-reflections consider the Kantian enlightenment in a manner that recognizes it as radically modern, yet also questions how it might be expanded or arranged differently. Pushing against Kant's subjective policing of both aesthetics and nature, these theorists, contesting the conventional repression of each domain in the philosophical tradition, imagining interdisciplinary modes of philosophy which dialogue with such spheres. In their movement beyond Kant's architectonic subjective Idealism, these thinkers consider alternative formal modes of philosophical grounding, envisioning avant-garde arrangements of the philosophical system that allow the actuality of philosophy to be theorized in a novel manner.

At the conclusion of his *Critique of Pure Reason (CPR),* Kant describes his "architectonic" conception of philosophy as an "art of constructing systems" under the

"government of reason" (*CPR*, 691). Thinking architecturally, Kant conceives of philosophy as an integrated whole into which all the parts fit, and where the completed "system"—or "architectonic of pure reason"—outlines "the unity of the manifold of cognitions under one idea" (*CPR*, 691), that is, according to the final ("cosmopolitan") ends of reason (*CPR*, 695). Though the project of reason is not absolutely completed with the *CPR*, Kant enlists future thinkers to make this "footpath into a highway" (*CPR*, 704). Reason and the corresponding practice of critique act to "police" the various moments of the system, ensuring each accord to its place within the architectonic (*CPR*, 114-5*)*. At this early stage in the critical project, Kant envisions two fundamental aims for "reason": "The philosophy of nature pertain[s] to everything that is; that of morals only [to] that which should be" (*CPR*, 695), the philosophy of nature and moral are then unified in the categories and the "spontaneity" of the subject. None of Hegel, Schelling, Benjamin or Adorno cast off Kant as simply false due to his limitations, but instead seek to meta-critically invade and supplement his program, providing a continual epigenesis and future for transcendental philosophy (Malabou, *Epigenesis,* 36-8).

Schelling experimentally unbinds Kant's antinomy between freedom and nature, transforming such polarities into the "ideal" and "real" moments of the "absolute." By dissolving Kant's rigid divisions in favour of an organic and unconditioned model of philosophy, Schelling allows the various "parts" of the system autonomy with respect to the "whole." Post-Kantian absolute Idealism refuses to localize "reason" in a particular site, choosing instead to deterritorialize its processes into both nature and consciousness, seeing both subject and object polarities as different "potencies" of the same absolute (*Ideas,* 30, 42, 49-50; Beiser, *Idealism,* 533). However, as Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* and "middle work" (roughly 1809-23) demonstrate, conceptualizing philosophy as a reciprocally interacting organic system troubles the architectonic stability of thought, instilling an inherent instability, or "*Ungrund*" (abyss), into the organization of knowledge (*FE,* 68-70).

Through an immanent critique of both Kant and Schelling's conceptions of thought, Hegel develops his own "encyclopedic" model of philosophy in which philosophy rationally orders insights from other disciplines within the organic and self-supporting system of "the encyclopedia" (*EO*, 49-55). The final image of philosophy appears as a "circle of circles," which monadologically reflects the same (dialectical-

formative) processes present in particular domains or disciplines.[11] Hegel's texts claim to be "circular" in their understanding of the process of knowledge formation, or *Bildung,* as a progression which begins from particular-abstract (or "one-sided") determinations, which gain a fuller determinacy by tarrying with their own contradictions, only to return to themselves with an absolute determinacy, understanding their place within the genetic whole (*SOL,* 750-1; *PS,* 492-3). Yet Hegel's corpus (along with Schelling's) illustrates the fundamental tension of German Idealism: on the one hand upwardly organizing itself in terms of increasingly complex stages, but on the other hand rupturing this *Aufhebung* through the ceaseless proliferation of various "accidents" (*PS,* 18-19), as *Spirit* takes countless detours en route to the absolute (Rajan, "Encyclopedia," 7-9).

The Frankfurt School inherits many key moments of the Hegelian encyclopedic conception of philosophy, along with many elements of "absolute Idealism," a tradition which is read "without absolutes."[12] In unbinding the encyclopedia from within the Hegelian program, they demonstrate the possibility of a "Hegelianism without reserve," to employ Derrida's phrase apropos of Bataille (259-60), that is, the possibility of bringing Idealism back with a difference, critically extracting autonomous moments, such as Hegelian encyclopedism, or Schellingian *Naturphilosophie,* which are able to be refashioned in speculative directions. Thinking philosophy without absolutes allows philosophy to be opened to the complexity of experience, while entering into new (inter) disciplinary constellations. These theorists create experimental Idealist models in which

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[11] Describing his encyclopedia as a self-reinforcing "circle of circles," Hegel will write: "Each of the parts of philosophy is a philosophical whole, a circle that closes upon itself; but in each of them the philosophical Idea is in a particular determinacy or element. Every single circle also breaks through the restriction of its elements as well, precisely because it is inwardly the totality and it grounds a further sphere. The whole presents itself therefore as a circle of circles, each of which is a necessary moment, so that the system of its peculiar elements constitutes the whole Idea—which equally appears in each single one of them" (*EL,* 39. cf. *EO,* 51; *PS,* 18-19).

[12] Throughout this dissertation I critically employ the term "absolute Idealism" to broadly gloss the thinking of Hegel and Schelling. Following Beiser (*Idealism,* 355-74), absolute Idealism should be distinguished from the critical Idealism of Kant and Fichte, in moving reason beyond the concepts and categories of the epistemic subject, and considering reason as manifesting in nature, history, politics, art, along with the structure of thought. However, I want to critically employ "absolute Idealism" as an Idealism without absolutes. For Rajan, an Idealism without absolutes, "brings materiality into conjunction with ideality," where materiality "as an analogue to *différance* or heterogeneity," "disturbs all absolutes" (*"*Introduction," 2). Rajan focuses primarily on Romanticism as a practice which decomposes and hybridizes Idealism such that it is able to reflect upon itself and its own trajectories towards Identity (*"*Introduction," 2-3). In this manner, I push back against the conciliatory and abstract moments of Idealism, focusing instead on those speculative accidents which resist the triumph of thought. These gestures of decomposing Idealism within a broader "general economy" will also be theorized by way of Bataille (*Accursed,* 9-44).

"accidents" or "members" which have gained "a separate freedom," are introduced back into the whole troubling the restricted economy of philosophy, and forcing a questioning of its limitations (Hegel, *PS,* 18-19; Schelling, *FE,*18). They create what Rodolphe Gasché has termed a "phantasmatology": a counter-encyclopedia of perversions in which philosophy is forced to tarry with its abject and downcast moments (*Phantasmatology,* 1-3, 210). These thinkers forward models of philosophy which are continually fractured by way of their disregarded un-thought, creating systems of rationality which tarry with, and risk themselves in relation, to accidents.

None of the theorists in this constellation returns to tradition in a nostalgic manner. Instead, they view the history of philosophy as an immense speculative laboratory of ruined models of thought. As Hegel narrated his own thought through the history of philosophy, world history, the history of art-aesthetics, and nature, these theorists conceive of past forms of thought as a continual site of speculative struggle, in which past ideas have the power to "blast open the continuum of history" (Benjamin, *SW 4:* 389-97). That is, to follow Nietzsche, they renew philosophy by way of a "historical sense": through the critical interrogation of past concerns by way of the present (*Will,* 220; *Use of History,* 40-7, 69-73). One can sift through the "ruins" of previous philosophies, like Benjamin's "rag-picker" (*SW* 4: 48; Missac, 43, 61, 97), seeing that the old Idealist systems "retain their validity as outlines of a world description" (Benjamin *OT,* 7).[13] As Adorno reminds us, "even those philosophers whose doctrines insist on the eternal and timeless acquired [via historical critique] their temporal nucleus, their historical status" (*CM,* 8). That is, via historical critique, previous philosophical systems are opened to their historical "truth-content," and are able to be judiciously invaded and refashioned in relation to new constellations of concerns (*AT,* 195). Benjamin elaborates on the manner in which certain historical epochs become "legible" or "citable" in

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[13] Describing the activity of the poet in terms of Baudelaire's "rag picker," a metaphor which can be extended to describe Benjamin's critical-historical method in general, Benjamin writes: "'Here we have a man whose job it is to gather the day's refuse in the capital. Everything that the big city has thrown away, everything it has lost, everything it has scorned, everything it has crushed underfoot he catalogues and collects. He collates the annals of intemperance, the capharnaum of waste. He sorts things out and selects judiciously: he collects like a miser guarding a treasure, refuse which will assume the shape of useful or gratifying objects between the jaws of the goddess of Industry.' This description is one extended metaphor for the poetic method, as Baudelaire practiced it. Ragpicker and poet: both are concerned with refuse" (*SW 4:* 48).

constellation with each other: "The past has left images of itself in literary texts that are comparable to those which light imprints on a photosensitive plate. Only the future poses developers active enough to bring these plates out perfectly" (*Arcades*, 482, 462-3).[14] Works have a "natural history," they continue to live and metamorphose via their "pre and post history," or works that come before and after them (Benjamin, *OT,* 24-5).

Benjamin's historical-critical understanding of philosophy should be supplemented by what I will term Adorno's "philosophical modernism," that is, the critical, or self-reflective employment of modern philosophical ideas. Adorno meta-critically interrogates the emergent modern philosophical ideals of thinkers such as Kant, within a more general philosophical-historical economy that considers the processes of modernization philosophically.[15] For Adorno, "modernism" conjures an evident aesthetic valence, as "modern art" connotes those works of art which are conscious of their own character as "semblance." That is, "modern" works are those that demonstrate a self-awareness of the artistic processes of production, along with the ideologies at work therein (*AT,* 132). In such a manner, a philosophical modernism is critically aware of its historical transcendental conditions (be they material, linguistic, naturalistic), while continuing to utilize "modern" philosophical ideals. Hegel, Adorno, Benjamin, and to some extent Schelling, can be considered philosophical "modernists," as none wholly

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[14] Describing this "now of recognizability," in which past historical epochs become "legible" in constellation with the concerns of the present, Benjamin writes to Horkheimer (describing his *Arcades* project): "If the pretext for the book is the fate of art in the 19th century, this fate has something to say to us only because it is contained in the ticking of a clock whose striking hour has just reached *our* ears" (*BC,* 509).

[15] To explicate Adorno's philosophical modernism, I adapt and supplement J.M. Bernstein's formulation of "political modernism," a term employed to describe Arendt and Adorno, both of whom "stage a critical debate on the social and critical dimensions of Modernity" (Rensmann & Gandesha, 1). For Bernstein (in "Political Modernism," 56-77), "critical modernity" (or "modernism") encompasses three intersecting valences (21, 56). The first consists in the forces of "modernization": the social and political transformations wrought by the modernization process. Such dynamics encompass "modernization" in the broad sense: the transformation of traditional forms of life by the disruptions of technology and market forces. Related to this is the second valence of the constellation referring to the new emergent "Ideals of modernity," which encompass the normative projects and concepts that arise out of and in response to the modernization process. These include ideals such as autonomy, enlightenment, critique, human rights, and dignity before the law, along with the public use of reason. Many of these ideals are crystallized in the writings of Kant, though they have a long pre-history (for instance in Rousseau) and are supplemented extensively by post-Kantian Idealism- Romanticism. Finally, the third valence, "modernism," entails the "critical" or "self-reflexive use of modernity" and its ideals (21, 56-7), that is, a mode of thought that is meta-critical with respect to modernity and its emergent ideals, one that is self-aware of the problematics wrought by modernization, along with an understanding of the limits and proper employment of "modern" philosophical ideas.

dispense with the meta-narratives of Modernity (for some "post-modernity), but rather, all are committed to modes of thought which continually reflect upon, and critique, Modernity and its emergent ideals.

This project locates Adorno and Benjamin within the German Idealist-romantic "force-field" (Adorno, *NL I:* 13): within a shared constellation of concerns relating to questions of the philosophical system, dialectics, and notions of (inter)disciplinarity.[16] However, this project should be distinguished from a mere influence study by way of the methodology of "the constellation," which reciprocally illuminates German Idealism and Critical Theory by way of each other, refusing to reduce Adorno and Benjamin to passive inheritors or active Marxist de-mystifiers of the Idealist tradition. I present Adorno and Benjamin as critical progenies of the Idealist tradition, while demonstrating the possibility of reading Idealism "after" Critical Theory, examining the post-historical epigenesis of Idealism's central notions. It thus also employs the historical-philosophical methods of Benjamin and Adorno to provide novel insights into the work of Hegel and Schelling. Far too often, German Idealism is derided as "panlogicist"— an excessively metaphysical program which attempted to articulate all of reality rationally— even to some extent by Benjamin and Adorno. Against such caricatured readings of Idealism, I present Hegel and Schelling as always already self-troubling and critical thinkers who provide pioneering approaches to the philosophical system, and as such, provide innovative approaches to the organization of knowledge, allowing for (inter) disciplinary constellations of philosophy with other disciplines. These thinkers open the "restricted economy" of the philosophical system in terms of a "general economy" which includes the philosophical system alongside its phantasmagoric "accidents" (Bataille, *Accursed,* 19-28).[17]

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[16] Adorno conceives of intellectual positions as "force-fields" of philosophical and material-social trajectories. That is, one must consider the philosophical content of a work in relation to its broader material-historical "truth-content," while not reducing either aspect to the other. Describing this in his lectures on Kant, Adorno writes: "I should like to urge you to conceive of philosophy as a force-field, as something in which the abstract concepts that come into contact with one another and constantly modify one another stand in for actual living forces" (*Kant,* 4).

[17] Though not part of the Frankfurt School or German Idealism, the writings of Bataille will be employed throughout this dissertation to clarify and elaborate several important ideas. Specifically, in relation to notions of negativity and transgression, along with the creation of a para-Hegelian "phantasmatology," Bataille's work can be read in critical constellation with these thinkers.

The core of this project builds on my Master's thesis—*The Correspondence(s) of Benjamin and Adorno* (2016)—continuing my sustained critical engagement with the work of Benjamin and Adorno. In both projects, I advocate reading Benjamin and Adorno in conjunction, seeing them as working out a shared philosophical project that would provide the transcendental conditions for an expanded philosophy of "experience" [*Erfahrung*]. Both thinkers seek to open traditional philosophical notions of "system" so as to encompass a greater degree of possible objects, imagining interdisciplinary conceptions of philosophy which incorporate insights from domains such as aesthetics, sociology, psychoanalysis, history, and technology. This should not be taken to suggest that Adorno and Benjamin are wholly similar, or decodable by way of each other; in fact one of the most profound forms of correspondence is "*(dis) correspondence*" (Arnott, 7, 42). However, their respective oeuvres provide important "prisms" through which to refract their corresponding ideas along with the philosophical tradition more broadly.[18] Throughout this project it will be demonstrated that one can speak of an "Adornian" or "Benjaminian" approach to (the history of) philosophy, models which proceed by refashioning their respective models of immanent historical critique.

Latent in this project is a dissatisfaction with the current Habermasian-Honnethian "communicative-reconciliatory" paradigm of Frankfurt School Critical Theory.[19] Though Honneth has done much to revitalize inquiry into the Frankfurt School's "first generation," particularly with respect to Lukács and his concept of "reification" (21-29), Habermas has summarily rejected the work of his teacher Adorno (*Communicative,* 366-92; *Modernity,* 266-70, 276, 284-92). Habermas' interventions have further reoriented the direction of critical social research towards the terrain opened

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[18] The relationship between Hegel and Schelling can likewise be thought in terms of (dis) correspondence. At times Hegel appears to brutally disagree with Schelling, as in his famous critique of Schelling as a mystical intuitionalist for whom "all cows are black" (*PS,* 9). However, Ng, and many others have drawn attention to the key role of Schelling in Hegel's formulation of the "speculative identity thesis" (between subject and object) (71-73), a thesis which subtends Hegel's mature writings as well (65). Hegel's influence on Schelling can be clearly seen in many texts from the latter's middle period, notably, Schelling's revised formulation of "the copula" (*FE,* 13-14), and the "rotary dialectic" of the 1815 *Ages of the World* (102-3).

[19] Habermas has redirected the theoretical orientation of critical theory from a negative critical interrogation of instrumental rationality, embodied by texts such as the *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* to a positive "communicative" dialogical model of critical theory, which understands reason as inter-subjectively arising out of deliberative acts within particular life worlds. Honneth has further clarified such a paradigm in relation to questions of "recognition." For a more detailed description of Habermas' relationship with his supervisor, Adorno, see, Wiggershaus (537-566).

by his own "communicative" approach to Critical Theory: one which sees "reason" as fundamentally intersubjective and communicative (*Communicative,* 1-21).[20] Such interventions have further served to occlude the true Idealist basis of Frankfurt School Critical Theory. This project does not advocate a wholesale rejection of the Habermasian paradigm of Critical Theory, though a thorough immanent critique of such a paradigm is beyond its scope. Instead, via critical exegesis, I performatively demonstrate the continual efficacy of the "first generation" of Frankfurt School Critical Theory, articulating a vast array of concepts and thought models latent in the writings of Benjamin and Adorno. In a similar manner, Hegel and Schelling, along with the tradition of German Idealism more broadly, should not simply be cast aside as metaphysical, dogmatic, or statist, but rather, should be seen as speculative terrain in which to articulate new possible understandings of the philosophical system, along with its relation to marginal domains such as nature and aesthetics.[21]

In summation, this dissertation has a few core aims which will be articulated here for reference throughout:

1.  To provide a critical exegesis of the writings of Benjamin and Adorno, whilst demonstrating the continued relevance, and ongoing nature, of the debates subtending their work. Even within the current paradigm of Frankfurt School critical theory (of Habermas and Honneth), it is argued that much still remains to be unearthed within the writings of Benjamin and Adorno, specifically with respect to their positive imperatives for a "coming philosophy." I advocate for new speculative readings of Benjamin and Adorno, excavating the subterranean potential futures latent in their writings, relating to issues of metaphysics, media theory, philosophies of nature, and political theory.

2.  To demonstrate that Adorno, Benjamin, Hegel, and Schelling have much to tell us about how one might conceive of philosophy as "actual" today: providing models through which to renew a formal methodological analysis generally absent from contemporary philosophy. I argue that these thinkers provide valuable "prisms" through which to reflect on formal questions related to the philosophical system.

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[20] More remains to be said regarding the relationship between Habermas and other thinkers in this project, notably Schelling and Benjamin. Habermas famously criticizes Benjamin's "consciousness raising" anarchistic model of political resistance, while simultaneously positively appraising Benjamin's early theory of language as a precursor to his own (see "Consciousness Raising," 92, 110-114, 123-124). In Chapter 5 on Schelling, I critically employ Habermas' dissertation to illuminate Schelling's thought.

[21] In such a manner Adorno and Benjamin move decisively against their contemporaries, Husserl and Heidegger, who see twentieth-century crises of philosophy as arising from the metaphysics of German Idealism (See *Being and Time,* 19-27).

3. To demonstrate the possibility of reading German Idealism "after" Critical Theory, that is, after its critique, or "without absolutes." This project continually argues that Hegel and Schelling are not simply outdated dogmatic thinkers, but rather, highly self-critical theorists who provide dynamic models for the philosophical system, along with interdisciplinary and speculative understandings of philosophy as a practice. These theorists also demonstrate complex and dynamic futures for transcendental modes of philosophical grounding.

4. To show that art, along with its criticism via aesthetics, has much to say to philosophy. In varying ways, all these thinkers (though specifically Adorno and Benjamin) contest the "fate of art" in the history of philosophy: resisting its "subsumption," or deficiency with respect to philosophy. This constellation of thinkers argues that art (along with its reception-critique, which can be broadly glossed as "aesthetics"), contains a plethora of thought models, and novel ways of interacting with the world. As such, art should not be seen as mere "imitation" (as for Plato), nor the simple occasion for subjective judgment (as for Kant), but rather as a form of thought in its own right, a prism through which one can reflect on philosophy.

5. To suggest that nature—understood as a dynamic and self-generative "other" to *Spirit* —deserves similar consideration in its own right. As with art, it is common to subsume the "tangle" of nature to a position of service within the unfolding of philosophy, refusing to give the ambiguities and complexities of the natural world their proper due. Both Hegel and Schelling theorize an organic and naturalistic, though non-reductive, starting point for philosophy, while Adorno and Benjamin elaborate a "natural historical" metaphysics of transience. Broadly stated, this project advocates for philosophical models which enter into dialogue with the para-philosophical domains of aesthetics and nature.

## Theory and Relation to Scholarship

"There is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is never free from barbarism, so barbarism taints the manner in which it was transmitted from one hand to another. The historical materialist therefore dissociates himself from this process of transmission as far as possible. He regards it as his task to brush history against the grain." Benjamin, "Theses on the Concept of History," *SW 4:* 392.

The constellation of thinkers presented in this project is meant to open a meta-critical space in which questions of philosophy's actuality can be reflected upon and experimented with. This project utilizes the constellation to expose philosophy to its own "margins" (Derrida, "Tympan," ix- xxix), exploring Idealism in constellation with Benjamin and Adorno: how they are indebted to Idealist categories and provide a means by which such categories can be critically refashioned. Such a mosaic posits Adorno and Benjamin as emblematic of Critical Theory, with Schelling and Hegel embodying distinct notions of absolute Idealism. The method of the constellation allows terms such as

"Idealism" and "Critical Theory" (or "the Frankfurt School") to be understood in an expanded sense, as porous vis-à-vis their own "margins." Idealism should be seen in a permeable relationship to Romanticism: the former designates a set of philosophical problematics ("identity, dialectic, system"), while the latter denotes a broader intellectual and artistic milieu which informs such considerations (Rajan, "Introduction," 14). Likewise, the "Frankfurt School" can be understood loosely as an assemblage of divergent thinkers, and intellectual viewpoints, not as a uniform or homogeneous school.

In existing scholarship,[22] the connections between German Idealism and Benjamin and Adorno have been taken up in piecemeal fashion and in ways that overemphasize the "critical" (or negative) character of Critical Theory as a project, thus failing to account for its positive ambitions as a new model for a "coming philosophy," or a new productive model of the humanities. In Adorno's case, Hegel (in specific relation to Marx and Lukács) has been overemphasized at the expense of Kant and other absolute Idealists such as Schelling.[23] Further, the full complexities of Adorno's Hegelianism have yet to be explored, particularly with regard to his interventions in the aesthetic domain. More generally, Frankfurt School Critical Theory has been understood (by S. Jefferies, M. Jay, R. Wiggershaus, J. Rose, S. Buck-Morss) as a Hegelian-Marxist turn occurring in Weimar Germany, which ignores the role played in its development by (Neo)-Kantianism, absolute Idealism, and the broader German Romantic milieu.[24] While

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[22] A more detailed analysis of scholarly debates surrounding each thinker will be undertaken within the individual chapters of this dissertation.

[23] Though the focus of this dissertation is on the constellation of Schelling, Hegel, Adorno and Benjamin, reference will be made to Kant throughout. As post-Kantian thinkers, these theorists meta-critically invade the Kantian program in various ways, demonstrating the continuing efficacy of Kant—and his method of the transcendental—for the thought of nature, aesthetics, experience, and language.

[24] Throughout these considerations, the term "(Neo) Kantianism" will be employed to describe a narrow subjective-epistemological conception of philosophy, one which sought to purify Kant of his metaphysical excesses, providing philosophy with a sure scientific basis in epistemology. Such a view can be contrasted with the "objective Idealism" of Hegel and Schelling, which, also responding to Kant, embraced the necessity of a broader metaphysical understanding of reason. Though Neo-Kantianism's main historical proponents where Herman Cohen, Paul Natorp and Ernst Cassirer, such an epistemological conception of philosophy has wide reaching implications, inaugurating the broader "deflationary" trajectory of philosophy in the twentieth-century. Neo-Kantianism was the "predominant philosophical movement in German in the final decades of the 19th century (1860-1914)," deeply shaping the later Weimar intellectual milieu of Benjamin and Adorno (Beiser, *Neo-Kantianism,* 1). Responding to what they termed a "crisis" in philosophical grounding, the Neo-Kantians attempted to return philosophy to its sure basis in the "theory of knowledge [*Erkenntnistheorie*]" or epistemology, which entailed "the examination of the methods, standards and presuppositions of the empirical sciences," along with a more general positivist "alignment of philosophy with the new natural sciences" (Beiser, *Neo-Kantianism,* 6). From Kant, these thinkers

Benjamin's engagement with the Idealist tradition has been recognized in certain ways, generally in relation to Kant (by P. Fenves, D. Ferris, H. Caygill, and, J. McCole), research has eschewed the relationship of his conception of criticism to systematic-Idealist thought, specifically thinkers such as Hegel and Schelling. Further, as I will argue in Ch. 3., Benjamin's engagement with Kant should be considered "post-Kantian" in the Idealist sense, continuing the meta-critical interventions of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. Likewise, with respect to the *Frühromantiker* (or "Early Romantics")*,* though the contours of Benjamin's engagement have been charted (by B. Hansen & A. Benjamin [Eds.], J.L. Nancy and P. Lacoue-Labarthe, Ferris, and McCole), the emergence of Benjamin's own destructive version of Romantic criticism—as elaborated in his *Trauerspiel* study, and essay on Goethe's *Elective Affinities—* has yet to be fully presented as an immanent critique of central tenets of both Idealism and Romanticism.[25] Simply put, Adorno and Benjamin are generally not read philosophically, and are instead marginalized as mere aesthetic theorists, or idiosyncratic (Marxist) cultural critics. Against such stereotypes, I advocate a return to their work as a vital space in which to pose questions regarding the "actuality" of philosophy.

These thinkers develop a mortuary Romantic vision of philosophy, in which allegory, transience, disaster, and ruin triumph at the expense of the symbolic totalities of the philosophical system. Not only do I foreground the presence of such a melancholic metaphysics in Benjamin and Adorno, centering analysis on their notion of natural history, but I argue that such an optic can be employed to analyze Hegel and Schelling as well, reading Hegel as a ruin and Schelling as a thinker of the diremptive fecundity of nature. This melancholic pathos allows these thinkers to be read "without absolutes," that is, as self-reflexive and self-troubling thinkers who provide the resources to think both the philosophical system along with its possible transgression.

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preserved "the Kantian dualisms between essence and existence; understanding and sensibility; the leading role of a critical and analytical method in philosophy; and the need for philosophy to follow rather than lead the natural sciences" (Beiser, *Neo-Kantianism,* 3). For more on the movement see, Beiser, *The Genesis of Neo-Kantianism.*

[25] Through this dissertation I alternately employ the terms "Early Romantics" or *Frühromantiker,* to describe the specifically German Romantic movement based primarily in Jena. See, Nancy & Lacoue-Labarthe, *The Literary Absolute* (1-17, for a timeline of the movement see, 23-5).

Formally, most scholarship has thought influence in a limited sense (as one thinker's explicit use of the thought of another) and has thus failed to account for the implicit relations existing between thinkers, or the potential for productive affinities to arise between thinkers when they are speculatively placed in relief. Benjamin's conception of criticism remedies this with his formulation of "the constellation": a collection of divergent historical elements (or thinkers) arranged in a mosaic and mediated through an immanent "Idea," which gives these respective elements a different sense than they have in isolation (*OT*, 10-13, 27). Benjamin describes such tensioned assemblages of pasts and presents as containing the capacity to "make the continuum of history explode": estranging one from quotidian philosophical-historical assumptions, while employing traditional models of thought to intervene upon the present moment (*SW 4:* 395). Particularly with respect to the "Frankfurt School," scholarship generally presents a linear developmental narrative which progresses through the various "generations" of Critical Theory, with one generation overcoming its predecessors. Against such narratives, I (re)turn to the methods of Benjamin and Adorno as a vital space for the ongoing articulation of critical social theory, while revitalizing inquiry in the tradition of "German philosophy."[26]

Further, given the proclivity in scholarship to view German Idealism as an epoch of dogmatic metaphysical bombast (from within both the continental and analytic tradition), Idealism as a whole (and with respect to the Frankfurt School) is generally seen in a negative light.[27] Adorno's relationship to Hegel is generally cast in a purely

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[26] Esposito, in his *Philosophy for Europe,* defines the specificity of "German philosophy" (63-108)—exemplified largely by the (first generation) Frankfurt School, though also Hegel and Nietzsche—as a certain "thought from the outside," a dwelling on the transcendental homelessness that arises when thought loses the purity of its Greek origin (4-6).

[27] A more detailed refutation of such problematic caricatures will be undertaken in the chapters of this project dealing with Hegel and Schelling (Ch. 5 & 6). The wholesale erasure of the tradition of Idealism from many philosophy departments based upon such problematic assumptions should not be considered "philosophical" in any sense of the word, and as such, readers of Idealism should not be forced to justify Idealism to people who refuse to deal with it on a textual or argumentative level. Hammer has noted the continued actuality of Idealism in relation to contemporary debates surrounding naturalism and the philosophy of science ("Introduction," 1-6), and his edited collection demonstrates the immense potential for new critical interpretations of such a tradition. Žižek has continually demonstrated the efficacy of both Hegel and Schelling with regard to an array of contemporary problems, seeing Schelling as a "vanishing mediator" between the concerns of Idealism and the quantum theory of the twentieth-century (*Indivisible,* 1-9); and more recently, positioning Hegel in dialogue with contemporary debates in neuroscience and the philosophy of mind (*Wired Brain,*7- 27).

disparaging manner, locating him as a negative (Marxist or "left Hegelian") critic of Hegel, who sought to fracture Hegelian "identity thinking" by way of the negative dialectical primacy of "non-identity" (*ND,* 5, 8, 12). Though Adorno is unquestionably critical of Hegel, and the "dominating character" of Idealism more broadly (*ND,* 11, 22-26), focusing solely on Adorno's negative interventions misses the complexity of Adorno (and Benjamin's) model of immanent critique, one in which the critic immanently unfolds the text according to its own logic(s).[28] Likewise, throughout Benjamin's early writings he continually works to "rescue," via immanent critical reconfiguration, key motifs and ideas from a diverse array of thinkers (Kant, Goethe, the *Frühromantiker,* and the Baroque poets): notions such as "allegory," "elective affinity," and "natural history," which Benjamin arranges in mosaic such that they are able to gesture beyond themselves and enter into broader philosophical conversations.

This project is in line with contemporary deconstructive-speculative readings of German Idealism, which push back against notions of Idealism as panlogicist, presenting instead modes of theorizing Idealism "without absolutes" (Rajan, "Introduction," 1-14). This project also moves against excessively "deflationary" readings of Idealism (particularly with respect to analytic "post-Kantian" readings of Hegel), which wholly disregard Hegel's holistic "encyclopedic" conception of philosophy, instead narrowly focusing on a single text, generally the *Phenomenology* or the *Logic,* as the "rational" kernel of Hegel's thought (for a critique of such views, see Comay & Ruda, 24, 14-15; Hammer, "Introduction," 1-6). Against such reductive readings of Hegel and Idealism more broadly, this project follows "revised metaphysical" interpretations of Hegel's corpus such as those of Beiser, that is, commentators who view Hegel's work in a holistic though nonetheless critical manner, demonstrating the continuing efficacy of his insights for domains such as aesthetics and the philosophy of nature (*Hegel,* 3, 6-7). This dissertation also follows thinkers such as Catherine Malabou who continually envision

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[28] Throughout these considerations, "immanent critique" will be broadly understood as the immanent evaluation of a thinker (or text) according to its own criteria or logic: the critical unfolding and deconstruction of a work according to its own elements or tensions. For Zuidervaart, "Immanent critique...tests each position to see whether its claims about the known are consistent with its own criterion of knowledge" (xviii) and marks the overwhelming sentiment of Hegelian and Post-Hegelian thought, including Benjamin and Adorno (xix). Both Adorno and Benjamin's models of immanent critique will be elaborated in more detail in Ch. 1 and 3 of this project.

new plastic "futures" for the Hegelian project (1-5, 7), though I advocate Hegel be seen in an immanent critical continuum with his "post-history" (Benjamin, *OT,* 27), most notably the work of Adorno.

With respect to Schelling, this project inhabits the critical space opened by the novel scholarship of Jason Wirth, Iain Hamilton Grant, Tilottama Rajan, and Slavoj Žižek. These theorists have not only resurrected Schelling scholarship in the Anglosphere, but they forward Schelling's corpus as containing a plethora of "post-Idealist" thought models, through which to think questions of (inter)disciplinarity, the philosophical system, along with a whole constellation of issues related to nature and ecology (and their relationship to philosophy). Within the contemporary horizon of climate catastrophe, thinkers such as Schelling provide a means to philosophize *with* nature, contesting the autarky of philosophy by way of the dynamism of the natural world.

Today it is far too common to treat German Idealism as a "dead dog": an epoch of speculative pretentiousness with little to say to contemporary concerns. Within our secular "post-metaphysical" age, theory approaches Idealism backwards, moving through its post-historical criticism in the Frankfurt School.[29] These post-historical readers of German Idealism continually illustrate the extent to which the German-Idealist-Romantic sphere of concerns remains a fertile space for scholarship, not an epoch that should be simply disregarded. The "post-idealist" philosophical perspectives of both Benjamin and Adorno demonstrate the continuing efficacy of key moments in the Idealist tradition. Though there are undoubtedly problematic and outdated moments in German Idealism, Benjamin and Adorno's texts provides a plethora of critical thought models through which to view Idealism, and with which to continually interrogate its central problematics.

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[29] Habermas defines a "post-metaphysical thinking" as an approach to the philosophical tradition which at once recognizes the importance of the Western tradition of metaphysics, while also seeking to critically renew such a tradition by ridding it of its metaphysical modes of grounding. Habermas wishes to found thought instead on intersubjective and deliberative modes of reason (vii-iii). For the main themes of post-metaphysical thought, see Ch. 3. "Themes in Post-Metaphysical Thinking" (28-51).

**Overview of the Individual Chapters**

Each part of this project, along with the individual chapters contained therein, should be considered discrete essayistic arguments which "monadologically" mirror broader trajectories, such that, if arranged in a mosaic, they present a cohesive argument.[30] Accordingly, the dissertation is divided into three main parts (of two chapters each), though the first two parts (on Adorno and Benjamin) can be heuristically grouped under the heading of the "Frankfurt School." The third part, on German Idealism, takes up the writings of Schelling and Hegel. Such a formal arrangement is intended to provoke reflection in the reader, interrogating what it might mean to read German Idealism "after" Critical Theory. That is, how might the "post-historical" writings of Benjamin and Adorno provide new translations of German Idealism, allowing the philosophical tradition to be though as "actual" in speculative ways?

**Part 1: Adorno**

Beginning with Adorno's writings from the 1960s— specifically the cycle of production surrounding *Negative Dialectics and Aesthetic Theory* (1960-9)—I elaborate the post-Idealist perspective animating this dissertation more broadly. In this constellation of texts, Adorno questions the very possibility of philosophy after the catastrophes of the century. My first chapter, ***Ruin, Disaster, Natural History: Adorno and the (Impossible) Possibility of Philosophy*** positions Adorno as one who theorizes the university (and philosophy) "in ruins"; that is, Adorno returns to philosophy—in a transcendental manner—while positing "the disaster" as the *"groundless ground"* (*Ungrund*) atop which philosophy is conducted. According to Adorno, if philosophy is to be considered "actual" in the face of such disasters, it must incorporate natural history into the very form of thought, tarrying with finitude and negativity, which as concepts and affects serve as the motor of Adorno's negative dialectic.

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[30] Leibniz first formulated the idea of reality being composed of infinite "monads," or ideal centers of reflection, which mirror within themselves an image of the whole of reality (68-81). Throughout this project, this term will be inflected by way of its "post-history" in Benjamin. In his "Epistemo-Critical Prologue" Benjamin defines his linguistic idea as a "monad" (*OT,* 27): as a "micrological" particular which reflects the same trajectories as the whole. For Benjamin, the task of (immanent) criticism entails the grouping of phenomena together as "ideas," which monadologically mirror large ideas, or present a historical epoch micrologically. Each chapter in this project similarly reflects broader trajectories, yet they can also be considered autonomous "accidents" (Hegel, *PS,* 18-19) which can be read against the whole.

My second chapter, ***Adorno and the Actuality of Philosophy: Inaugurating a New Conflict of the Faculties***, examines the conflictual disciplinary relations Adorno elaborates between philosophy and the domains of sociology and psychoanalysis, along with the more fundamental negative dialectical relationship between philosophy and aesthetics. I also explore the prefiguration of this notion of conflict within post-Kantian Idealism: analyzing the (inter) disciplinary relations of Kant, Hegel and Schelling. For Adorno, art and aesthetics—or the reception and production of art—provoke a "shudder" in the constitutive subject of philosophy. Adorno employs aesthetics as a means to provide a critical commentary on rationality, importing alternative logics and formal imperatives into philosophy, while reflecting on the possibility of new philosophical relationships to the natural world.

## Part 2: Benjamin

These chapters elaborate the antinomical trajectories of Benjamin's early writings (~1928), locating him within the post-Kantian field of concerns. I read Benjamin's early writings (up to his 1925/8 *Trauerspiel*) as micro logically rehearsing the movement beyond Kant—by way of an immanent meta-critical expansion of the Kantian program – undertaken by many in the post-Kantian Idealist generation, notably Schelling, Hegel and the *Frühromantiker.* Chapter 3, ***Benjamin's Systematic Intentions: Towards a Transcendental Philosophy of Experience***, examines Benjamin's "Program" for a philosophy of the future, charting his opening of the Kantian transcendental by way of experience and language. Benjamin elaborates what I term a transcendental philosophy of experience [*Erfahrung*]: a model of philosophy which seeks to do justice to the polyphonic continuum of experiences in the world, moving beyond Kant's reduction of experience to its mere possibility. Such a philosophy is made possible by Benjamin's mimetic understanding of language, which is able to translate (and mediate) the full continuum of experience. I further position Benjamin's thought of experience within the emergent (German) constellation of media theory, analyses which remain efficacious for contemporary considerations of media(tion).

My fourth chapter, ***Benjamin's Mortuary Philosophy: Towards a Natural History of Transience***, examines Benjamin's movement beyond (neo) Kantianism due to its impoverished epistemological conception of philosophy, and his entrance into the

post-Kantian Idealist Romantic field of concerns. Benjamin's engagement with such Romantic notions—understood broadly to encompass the *Frühromantiker*, Goethe, Hegel and Schelling— provides an occasion for him to theorize his speculative philosophy of criticism, along with the metaphysical doctrine of natural history subtending his thought. My analysis culminates in a reading of Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* as a mortuary Romantic text, foregrounding notions of allegory and natural history as keystones of his philosophy of transience.

**<u>Part 3: German Idealism</u>**

In these two chapters on Schelling and Hegel respectively, I return to German Idealism after Critical Theory, utilizing the theoretical perspectives of Benjamin and Adorno to read Idealism "without absolutes," that is, in a critical and self-fracturing manner. Though both Benjamin and Adorno deconstruct and refashion Idealism, these chapters demonstrate Hegel and Schelling to be always already self-troubling thinkers who propose forceful and interdisciplinary understandings of the philosophical system, opening thought by way of encounters with the para-philosophical domains of aesthetics and nature.

In chapter five, ***Philosophy with Nature: Schelling and the "Original Diremption in Nature itself***,*"* I examine the originality of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* in relation to conventional enlightenment philosophies of nature (as typified by Kant). Schelling is one who strives to philosophize with nature, that is, one who allows the processes of the natural world to "arise philosophically." I then take up texts from Schelling's anxious "middle phase"—notably *The Freedom Essay* and the (1815) *Ages of the World*—texts in which the abyssal ground of nature threatens any possible philosophical artifice.

In chapter six, ***Hegel as a Ruin: Avenues of "Phantasmatological" Inquiry*** (***Aesthetics, Nature***), I present my own "ruined" reading of Hegel, one following after the "phantasmatological" interventions of Bataille and Hegelian Marxism. Hegel's philosophy of nature, along with his aesthetics, will be examined as phantasmatological offshoots—or "accidents" —which trouble the stability of Hegel's encyclopedia, serving as "prisms" through which one can reflect on the Hegelian project more generally. These domains demonstrate the varying ways in which Hegel's project can be read beyond

itself, along with the possibility of a critical cross pollination between aesthetics and nature, such as is demonstrated by Adorno's dialectical image of "natural-beauty."

# Part 1: Adorno

"The only philosophy which would still be accountable in the face of despair, would be the attempt to consider all things, as they would be portrayed from the standpoint of redemption...It must comprehend even its own impossibility for the sake of possibility. In relation to the demand thereby imposed on it, the question concerning the reality or non-reality of redemption is however almost inconsequential." Adorno, *Minima Moralia,* 247.

Part one of this dissertation focuses on Adorno's writings from the 1960s: the cycle of production of texts, lectures, and essays that culminated in *Negative Dialectics* (1966) *and Aesthetic Theory* (1969/70). Within this constellation of texts, Adorno existentially questions the possibility of philosophy in relation to the disasters of the twentieth-century, demanding how, in the face of such atrocities, philosophy could say anything meaningful at all. As a theorist, Adorno never let a good crisis go to waste: philosophy must tarry with the negativity of crisis, confronting its own constitutive finitude by incorporating "conflict" into the organization of knowledge, while attempting to "write" the disaster of history via reflexive considerations of the form of philosophy. These chapters examine Adorno's novel theses regarding the "actuality" of philosophy in the face of catastrophe, considering his speculative and experimental imperatives for both philosophy and the proximate practice of aesthetics. As one who interrogated the possibility of philosophy in relation to historical events, Adorno remains shockingly modern, a point further underscored by his proximity to a vast array of twentieth-century theorists (such as Blanchot, Deleuze, Foucault, Rancière, and Lyotard). This dissertation commences with Adorno so as to frame the question of philosophy in relation to crisis, and in order to elaborate the "post-Idealist" perspective animating these considerations more broadly.

Adorno is what I will term a "post-Idealist" thinker: one who critically interrogates the German Idealist legacy, immanently working through its problematics and central notions, considering questions of autonomy and the philosophical system, along with the relation between philosophy and para-philosophical domains such as aesthetics and nature. Adorno's "negative dialectic" should not be localized to a specific text, but rather, should be seen as the overarching post-Idealist sentiment of his thought, a mode of thinking Idealism "without absolutes." The following chapters (1-2) chart Adorno's nebulous "negative dialectic," along with the metaphysical notion of "natural

history" subtending it. Beginning with ruin and the disaster, these chapters theorize Adorno's imperatives for both philosophy and art following crisis, considering the main valences and disciplinary implications of Adorno's negative dialectic. Despite Adorno's (Marxist) sensitivity to historical particularity, he remains squarely within the post-Idealist transcendental tradition, though for Adorno the "groundless ground" (*Ungrund*) of transcendental thought has become the disaster. Such an *Ungrund* leads Adorno to the elaboration of his negative dialectical model of philosophy, which favors ruin, allegory and transience over the absolute closure of the philosophical system. In pragmatic terms this leads Adorno to put the disciplines into conflict—a conflict already present in Hegel and Schelling—and one sharpened further by Adorno's invasion of philosophy by aesthetics, and the "counter-sciences" of sociology and psychoanalysis.

# 1 *Ruin, Disaster, Natural History: Adorno and the (Impossible) Possibility of Philosophy*

## 1.1 Adorno's University in Ruins

"Spiegel: Professor Adorno, two weeks ago, the world seemed in order…
Adorno: Not to me."
"Who's Afraid of the Ivory Tower," May 5, 1969, *Der Spiegel.*

On April 22, 1969, amidst the tumult of the student protests, Adorno entered the lecture hall at Goethe-Universität in Frankfurt am Main (renamed "Karl Marx-Universität by the occupying students) to deliver, or rather to participate in, what would be his last lecture. Supposedly, this lecture was to preface the main themes of his forthcoming course, "Introduction to Dialectical Thinking," which would describe Adorno's "subject-object" model of dialectical cognition.[31] Implicitly, giving such a course amidst the political-revolutionary tensions of the 1960s represented Adorno's attempt to uphold the primacy of "theory" over and against the "passport stamp" of political praxis (*Lectures ND,* 53-4). The story at this point is well known: before the lecture could commence the German mandarin was met with immediate resistance by the student occupiers, who attempted to entice Adorno into public "self-criticism," under the newly graffitied inscription, "If Adorno is left in peace, Capitalism will never cease." Adorno attempted to be democratic by inviting the students to explicate the motivations for their actions, along with their intentions for the remainder of the lecture. In response he was met by the infamous "*Busenattentat*" (breast assassination), whereby three female students approached the podium, bore their breasts, and showered Adorno with flowers. Visibly shaken by the incident, Adorno collected his materials and promptly left the lecture hall and the university more generally, traveling to the Swiss Alps to continue work on his *Aesthetic Theory.* After a heart complication suffered on the Matterhorn,

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[31] Such a model is elaborated in two essays, "On the Subject and Object" (245-58) and "Marginalia for Theory and Praxis" (259-78), both of which are collected under the heading "Dialectical Epilegomena" in *Critical Models* (1969).

Adorno would die on August 6, 1969.[32] At the end of Adorno's life, the university ostensibly lay in ruins, with philosophy seeming an impossible, or pointless exercise.

It is far too easy to stereotype Adorno as some outdated elitist: some antiquarian who was sexually repressed, who hated jazz and horoscopes, along with all popular culture. Adorno is lampooned as one who could not personally or theoretically survive the 1960s, a view which the "*Busenattentat*" seems to confirm. However, a more nuanced analysis reveals Adorno as a tragic figure, one engulfed by the same trajectories his work diagnosed: the growing specter of a positivist instrumental rationality, new forms of authoritarian "identity-thinking," and the continuing destruction of nature by enlightenment and capitalist narratives of progress (*ND,* 11-12, 22-24, 67; *AT,* 64-72; *DE,* 1). In their correspondence on the efficacy of the student protests and the movements of the 1960s more broadly, Marcuse urged Adorno to view the students' actions as revolutionary situations in which "theory is pushed further by practice"; against this Adorno sought to maintain the purity of "Critical Theory" as an unconditioned intellectual perspective not to be exhausted by its particular manifestations (*Adorno-Marcuse,* 125).[33]Adorno further advocates that the theory-practice relation itself be criticized, casting a new import on theory as a practical political act: "In my writings, I have never offered a model of any kind of action or for some specific campaign. I am a theoretical being who views theoretical thinking as lying extraordinarily close to his artistic intentions" ("Ivory Tower,"15).[34]

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[32] For a comprehensive overview of Adorno's "last lecture" see, "Death" (474-480) in Müller-Doohm, *Adorno.*

[33] In correspondence with Marcuse, Adorno diagnoses the students' actions as containing a "regressive character," with their dogmatic and uncompromising insistence on "practice" over theory. As he writes, "the barbaric inhumanity of a mode of behaviour that is regressive and even confuses regression with revolution; the blind primacy of action; the formalism which is indifferent to the content and the shape of that against which one revolts, namely our [critical] theory" (*Adorno-Marcuse,* 132). And further, describing his own position as the dialectical unification of theory and practice: "dialectics means, amongst other things, that ends are not indifferent to means" (*Adorno-Marcuse,* 132). In his May 5th interview with *Der Spiegel*, Adorno clarifies that he is not *a priori* opposed to political practice; however, he stresses that politics (and praxis) must take into account the socio-historical context in which any action would take place: "the value of so-called individual actions is delimited by an emphasis on social totality" ("Ivory Tower," 16).

[34] Adorno describes the importance of a theoretical perspective within the total ideology of "practicality" throughout his work. As he asserts in his interview with *Der Spiegel:* "I still believe that one should hold on to theory, precisely under the general coercion toward praxis in a functional and pragmatized world. And I will not permit even the most recent events to dissuade me of what I have written" ("Ivory

Against calls to man the barricades or to return to some authentic state of nature free of domination, Adorno stridently upheld "theory" against practical "pre-censorship": "Thinking is a doing, theory a form of practice" (*ND,* 143-4; *CM,* 261). Adorno diagnoses this constant need to "be practical," or to evaluate things pragmatically in terms of their use, as a symptom of capitalist ideology. Following Lukács, Adorno saw capitalism as not simply a material mode of production, but rather, as a system of thought, or a "spell," which generalized a certain logic of "exchange-value," making the world appear as "reified," a "second nature," a Baroque horizon of capitalist realism (Lukács, *Consciousness,* 83-92; *Novel,* 64; *ND*, 4-6). To escape such ideological antinomies, one must think differently (or dialectically), recognizing the critical self-reflection of thought upon itself as a form of praxis.

Despite Adorno's reputation as a cynical "resentment thinker"—a brutal pessimist content to dwell in the "grand hotel abyss," or one who undermines the normative tradition of the enlightenment—Adorno's work provides a plethora of models by which to think the university, or the organization of knowledge "in ruins" (Sloterdijk, xxxiv-xxxviii; Lukács, *Novel,* 22; Habermas*, Modernity,* 266-70, 276, 284-92).[35] Adorno strove to think through the possibility of philosophy, along with the disciplinary organization of the university, in a manner that did justice to both the historical dissonance of the twentieth-century and the tradition of German Idealism-Romanticism. As will be argued throughout these chapters, the fundamental gesture of Adorno's post-Idealism—which immanently works through the German-Idealist-Romantic legacy—lies in its commitment to key aspects of both the Kantian and Hegelian program, oftentimes in negative dialectical contradiction with each other. Following Bloch, the aim is "to let

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Tower,"19). Describing the act of thinking as a form of resistance, Adorno writes in his essay "Marginalia to Theory and Practice": "Whoever thinks offers resistance; it is more comfortable to swim with the current, even when one declares oneself to be against the current" (*CM,* 263).

[35] Readings describes his "ruined" model of the university in a manner that forcefully echoes Adorno's own views: "we should not attempt to bring about a rebirth or renaissance of the University, but think its ruins as the sedimentation of historical differences that remind us that Thought cannot be present to itself...The University is not going to save the world by making the world more true...dwelling in ruins is not despair or cynicism; it is simply the abandonment of the religious attitude toward political action" (171). Readings' model is not animated by nostalgia for some past golden age, nor some authentic model of the university; instead, it recognizes that "the past is not erased but haunts the present" (169-70), seeing the tradition as a critical site through which to reflect on the present.

Kant burn through Hegel: the self must remain in everything; though it may first exteriorize itself everywhere" (*Spirit,* 187, cf.165-87). In reading these thinkers in experimental tension, Adorno unfolds a speculative mode of philosophy which combines the epistemic modesty of the Kantian transcendental subject with an analysis of social totality provided by Hegel (and Marx). Such a post-Idealist reception of the tradition informs Adorno's broader understanding of the university, an institution he reads in a "ruined" manner by inaugurating a new conflict between various faculties of knowledge.

Adorno thinks the university as what Readings calls a "ruined institution" (169), one which refuses to territorialize knowledge in a universal or systematic manner; instead, a ruined university makes critique, or negativity, the motivating factor in the distribution of knowledge. A ruined model is not driven by some nostalgia for authenticity, nor for the desire to make the university great, unified, or whole again, but rather, by a commitment to what Readings calls a "community of dissensus" (178-193): a desire to "teach the conflicts" (127), refusing to cover over the tensions—and the continual contestatory dialogue—involved in the humanities and the "scene of teaching" (154-5). A "ruined" understanding of the university is one which gives "an account of the production and circulation of knowledge that imagines *thinking without identity,* that refigures the university as a locus of dissensus" (Readings, 127). That is, it affirms a perpetual conflict between the various "faculties" of knowledge. Such sentiments are echoed by Rancière  (in *Dissensus,* 2002), who positions politics and art as forms of "dissensus" with respect to quotidian "distributions of the sensible," disrupting the logic of identity and consensus by way of materiality, provoking reflection as to how one might re-territorialize the domain of "the sensible" differently (1-2, 36, 141, 207).[36] For Adorno, philosophy must enter into a similar conflict with quotidian assumptions: contesting the discursive norms of various disciplines and forcing a philosophical questioning of their suppositions and methods. However, philosophy itself is not exempt

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[36] More remains to be said regarding the relationship between Rancière and Adorno. Rancière should be seen as continuing Adorno and Benjamin's post-Idealist (and post-aesthetic) interrogation of philosophy, in which the aesthetic and philosophy are placed in constellation, opening a reciprocal dialogue between the two domains. Rancière follows Adorno, Lukács, and Benjamin in positioning art (and aesthetics) as playing a leading role in imagining new political distributions of reality and sensibility.

from such critical examinations and must continually engage in meta-critical evaluation of its assumptions and relationship to the world. It is this renewal of a conflictual understanding of the organization of knowledge—in which methodological reflection is not external, but rather, an internal presupposition of knowledge—that places Adorno squarely within the German Idealist force-field of concerns.

For Adorno, philosophy must actively put itself at risk, examining how it could possibly "live on" after "the point to realize it was missed" (*ND,* 3): after the historical atrocities of the twentieth-century, along with the failure of Marxist attempts to "actualize" Idealist promises of freedom (*Metaphysics,* 101; *ND,* 358-372).[37] Philosophy wins such an afterlife with the proviso that it "ruthlessly criticize itself" (*ND,* 3), interrogating the role of its own concepts and categories in oppression, while imagining models of thought that are continually self-fracturing, critical, and non-concurrent. Such a negative prohibition on positive "utopian images*,*" or a generalized "*Bild verboten,*" in which thought does not posit itself positively, but rather negates existing reality, is a key feature of both Adorno's philosophy and his aesthetics. Such critical gestures present a guarded form of utopianism, one which holds open the possibility of "something more," which can only be grasped via "determinate negation," or "negativity" (Adorno & Bloch, 16, 12-13). Adorno's model attempts, through the complete negation of existing reality, to refract a fragmentary image of utopia—espousing theoretical "messages in a bottle" (Adorno & Horkheimer, *Manifesto,* 101)— holding fast to the possibility of a more perfect form of reason, along with a non-dominating relationship to the natural world (*ND,* 373-75; *AT,* 61-75). Preserving such vestiges of utopianism should be seen as one of the key lineages of twentieth-century post-Idealism, participated in by Adorno, Benjamin, Lukács, and Bloch.

Adorno's vital commitment to (re)imagining philosophy, along with the territories of the university, positions him within post-war questions of university reconstruction, as one who attempting to theorize a new university, "without condition" (Derrida,

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[37] For More on Adorno's thinking as an "afterimage" of twentieth-century Marxism see, Hutchins, "The Passing Away of Nature" (6-36, 105-110) and Cutrone, "Adorno's Marxism" (1-10, 41-77, 201-83, 395-411).

*University,* 24-5). That is, Adorno sought to return philosophy to its unconditioned speculative vocation, envisioning a model of philosophy unbeholden to market or political imperatives. Adorno actively revitalized the public use of reason in Adenauer's Germany, giving well attended public lectures (from 1958-69), and had much to say regarding possible relationships between philosophy and emergent media (such as television and radio), along with the potential for new interdisciplinary constellations between philosophy and nascent disciplines such as sociology and psychoanalysis (Jenemann, vii-xxxv, 47-104). Virtually all of the main motifs of *Negative Dialectics* are provisionally figured in Adorno's prolific lectures, such that one could say he "carried out his education in public" (Hegel, *History 3,* 513). Adorno not only participated in German university modernization, but made prominent contributions to the post-war public sphere, the most notable of which was his timely, "The Meaning of Working Through the Past" (1959), which as a radio address, attempted to publicly "work through" in psychoanalytic fashion, the traumas of the century and the German guilt complex.[38] In his "Philosophy and Teachers" (1962),  Adorno rails against mechanical notions of the "professional philosopher," arguing that "philosophy fulfills itself only where it is more than a specialty," returning to the holistic sentiments of Idealism as exemplified in Schelling's *On University Studies* (*CM,* 21-22, 34-5).[39] Employing a fractured notion of *Geist,* Adorno follows Hegel in imagining the "actuality" of philosophy anew, speculatively moving beyond the confines of epistemology, while envisioning new possible disciplinary organizations (*PS*, 27, 39-41).

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[38] In this radio–address Adorno attempts to work through the "guilt complex" surrounding national socialism in post-war Germany. Adorno begins by drastically asserting that the past "lives on" surviving in "fascist tendencies" and ways of life within democracies (*CM,* 89-90). Describing the trauma of the historical past, Adorno proclaims, "One wants to break free of the past: rightly, because nothing at all can live in its shadow, and because there will be no end to the terror as long as guilt and violence are repaid with guilt and violence; wrongly because the past that one would like to evade is still very much alive" (*CM,* 89). Adorno closes his address with the hope of a reconciled relationship with history: "The past will have been worked through only when the causes of what happened have been eliminated. Only because the causes continue to exist does the captivating spell of the past remain to this day unbroken" (*CM,* 103).

[39] Describing his spiritual affinity with Schelling's work, Adorno writes, "it is most astounding that the situation in 1803, when the German philosophical movement had reached its height does not differ so much in regard to the issues here under discussion in the present day when philosophy no longer exercises such authority" (*CM,* 24-5).

Adorno continually upsets any stable relationship between "the faculties," which can be understood in a dual sense, encompassing both knowledge and the university (following Deleuze, *Kant,* 3): provoking a perpetual conflict or dissensus within the organization of thought, while embracing novel and experimental constellations of disciplines. Adorno turns the resources of German Idealism in a critical manner, reading the philosophical tradition "against the grain" (Benjamin, *SW 4:* 392): a modernist approach to the practice of philosophy which arranges concepts and ideas in a mosaic of "non-identical" tension, self-reflectively employing modern philosophical ideals. In addition to *ND* and *AT,* Adorno's main philosophical works are on Hegel, Kierkegaard, Husserl, and Kant, thinkers whom he speculatively invades, opening their work to historical-material circumstances, while not wholly reducing them to it.[40] As Adorno asserts apropos of Hegel, though such a remark could be extended to describe Adorno's avant-garde approach to the tradition more broadly: "No reading of Hegel can do him justice without criticizing him...it is not the worst reader who provides the book with disrespectful notes in the margin" (*Hegel,* 145). Critical philosophy, for Adorno, is the continual writing of such "disrespectful" marginal notes.

Adorno remains committed to a transcendental conception of philosophy (O'Connor, 15). For Kant, transcendental philosophy investigates the *a priori* "conditions of possibility" for knowledge and is "occupied not so much with objects as with the mode of our knowledge of objects in so far as this mode of knowledge is to be possible *a priori*" (*CPR*, 133). However, like his (seemingly unknown) contemporary Foucault, Adorno works to historicize the transcendental, thinking it from the standpoint of genesis, providing an "epigenesis" of transcendental thought, while opening philosophical grounding by way of an interaction with the constellation of empirical particularity, history, and other disciplines (Malabou, *Epigenesis,* 36-8). As Adorno writes, "what is the *substantial meaning* that we are left with in Kant? The answer lies in a revision of the concept of the transcendental...consider[ing] all the things that do *not* come within the compass of the transcendental" (*Kant,* 210). Adorno considers the transcendental

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[40] These texts are, *Hegel: Three Studies* (1963)*, Kierkegaard: The Construction of the Aesthetic* (1933), *Against Epistemology: A Meta-critique. Studies in Husserl and the Phenomenological Antinomies* (1934-37/1955-56), and his *Lectures on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (1959).

conditions of knowledge in a manner that gives space to material-social forces (or ideology), and history, in the production of thought.

Like Foucault in *The Order of Things* (1966)*,* Adorno contests the autarky of philosophy by way of "counter-sciences" (for Adorno, sociology, and psychoanalysis) that lead the "human sciences," back to their "analytic of finitude," "un-mak[ing] that very man who is creating and recreating his positivity in the human sciences" (*Order,* 379). Adorno simultaneously examines alternative and contestatory relationships between the "faculties" of both the mind and the university, a notion which Deleuze also deterritorializes in Kant (*Kant*, 3-10, 68). Instead of a model of knowledge based around some centralized or unifying principle—be it nationalism, "culture, *Bildung,* or excellence" (Readings, 3, 11-14, 21-43)—for Adorno, systems of knowledge and disciplines of thought are continually placed in conflict with each other, without definitive resolution, provoking reflection in one domain by way of another. Most notable is the conflict Adorno locates between aesthetics and philosophy, presenting insights from both domains in a mosaic of tension, though Adorno also develops conflictual relationships between philosophy and the spheres of sociology, psychoanalysis, and historical materialism, all of which open philosophy to its own conditions of precarity and finitude. These disciplinary conflicts will be explored in more depth in the following chapter (2.0).

Employing the resources of the philosophical tradition—specifically those of German Idealism-Romanticism—Adorno endeavors to theorize novel relationships between philosophy (or the humanities more broadly) and the domains of "first and second nature," that is, the natural world along with the historically encoded domain of cultural conventions. As a thinker of "S*pirit*" (*Geist*)— "the I that is We and the We that is I" (Hegel, *PS,* 110; cf. Cassirer, 874-880)—Adorno strove to move beyond siloed understandings of intellectual inquiry. Adorno worked to philosophize in a holistic and interdisciplinary manner, and in so doing, (re)considered philosophy's actuality as a discipline: theorizing its relationship to the natural world and other faculties of knowledge in experimental directions. However, Adorno equally contests the final autarkic triumph of philosophy endemic to the Hegelian program – "the whole is the false" *MM,* 50)—continually critiquing such absolute unities by way of critical

"accidents" which disrupt philosophy's final unity (*PS,* 18-19). This meta-critical or self-reflexive understanding of philosophy is central to German Idealism, which centralizes such a "thinking of thinking of thinking" (Benjamin, *SW 1:* 127-9), and Adorno deliberately returns to such a conflictual understanding of philosophy. As a post-Idealist thinker, Adorno speculatively reinvigorates the Idealist tradition, demonstrating that thinkers such as Kant and Hegel, should not be derided as limited, or metaphysical, but rather provide a plethora of thought models, or prisms, through which to (re)imagine disciplinarity, along with the relationship of philosophy to politics and the natural world.

## 1.2    Adorno's Writing of the Disaster: Crisis and the Possibility of Philosophy
"Art has to offer something other than stylized despair." Ben Lerner, *10:04,* 130.

According to Adorno, things are bad and getting worse. His pessimism stands unmatched in the history of philosophy, with the possible exception of E. Cioran or A. Schopenhauer. But it is Adorno's Idealism that leaves him disappointed. One can imagine the type of jeremiads our contemporary late capitalist crises would elicit from him, though his work remains shockingly prescient, diagnosing many of the pathologies of Western thought that are now explicitly jutting to the fore: crises of economy and ecology (and their interrelation) being the foremost.[41] Adorno begins and ends with the catastrophe: there will be no triumphant exertions of philosophy or exultant work of art, simply a ruin to which everything must (re)turn. Paradoxically, a fragile hope—or negative utopianism—exists when one looks at such negativity squarely, as Adorno maintains a minimal faith in the "impossible possibility" of enlightenment and its promises of emancipation (*MM,* 247). Animated by his own experience of exile, Adorno fractures Idealism by way of the crises of the twentieth-century: the failures of the

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[41] The thought of Adorno has rightfully been recognized as an important forerunner to the environmental movement (in the West), providing important "thought models" with which to think through notions of ecology and environmental philosophy that deconstruct static notions of "nature" and criticize the violent nature of western enlightenment (Cook, *Nature,* 1, 121-154; Vogel, 7-8). Against the grain of previous scholarship, which has largely been content in pointing out affinities between the Frankfurt School and environmentalism, I forward Benjamin and Adorno as delivering the metaphysical promise of "natural history ," which de-reifies contemporary notions of "ecology" and "nature," allowing one to think concepts of nature as "actual" in dynamic new ways—theorizing new metaphysical relations between subject, object, nature, history, and technology.

Marxist project, along with the rise of modern totalitarianism, which he broadly collects under the heading of "Auschwitz."[42] Crisis, failure, and negativity become the animating motors of his thought: "The splinter in your eye is the best magnifying-glass" (*MM,* 50). Adorno employs a Romantic aesthetic of ruination, emphasizing fragmentation, or "non-identity," against tyrannical "identity thinking," whilst utilizing his trademark acerbic irony or "melancholy science" (*ND,* 11-12, 162-3, 326-30; *MM,* 15). Such a sardonic form of thought attempts to do justice to Adorno's remark apropos of Kafka: "If there is hope ...it is in those extremes rather than in the milder phrases: the capacity to stand up to the worst by making it into language" (*Prisms,* 254).

Given Adorno's continual resistance to the imperialism of conceptual thought, he repeatedly turns to aesthetics—a domain supposedly surpassed by Hegel en route to (philosophical discursive) "absolute knowledge"—in order to expand the purview of reason, while criticizing its twentieth-century instrumental manifestations. Adorno's 1933 *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic* critically redeems the "aesthetic sphere" from its position of subservience to religion and philosophy (in the Hegelian project), presenting it as an arena of natural-historical ciphers, which are in turn read as allegories through which to reflect upon philosophy (23, 64-5, 87, 93, 126-7; Buck-Morss, *Dialectics,* 116-7). Fundamental to Adorno's recovery of philosophy is a permeable relationship between philosophy and art (or aesthetics). In Hegel, aesthetics is (purportedly) a mere moment in the coming to self-identity of philosophy, while for Adorno, art and its philosophical supplementation in aesthetics play a fundamental role in imagining new more porous models of rationality.[43]

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[42] By Auschwitz, Adorno does not simply mean the brute historical occurrence of the camps, but rather a more general destructive logic emerging out the dialectic of enlightenment. As he asserts in his *Lectures on Metaphysics:* "by [Auschwitz] I mean not only Auschwitz but the world of torture which has continued to exist after Auschwitz and of which we are receiving the most horrifying reports from Vietnam—through all this the concept of metaphysics has been changed to its innermost core. It is therefore impossible, I would say, to insist after Auschwitz on the presence of a positive meaning or purpose to being…The affirmative character which metaphysics has in Aristotle and which it first took on in Plato's teaching, has become impossible" (*Metaphysics,* 101).

[43] A key characteristic of Adorno's work as a philosopher is how often he writes on the arts, literature and music (Wiggershaus, 66-95). Beginning his career as a musician, Adorno never abandoned his passion for all things beautiful and aesthetic. Further, the ruined aesthetic (of *AT*) is the culmination of his philosophy, demonstrating a fungible relationship between philosophy and aesthetic-critical writing, in a manner akin to many in the tradition of French Theory. As I will argue, in Ch. 6, the self-identity of Hegel's philosophy is

Adorno stages a primary conflict between philosophy and material social reality which he broadly glosses as "society." Particularly in his post-World War Two writings, Adorno stresses "the disaster" (to follow Blanchot) as a transient historical *a priori* for philosophy: a recognition of the perpetual inadequacy of thought (either philosophical or aesthetic) in the face of historical material givenness. [44] This disaster has always already occurred, the only question that remains is how one is to comport oneself. Such a catastrophic *a priori* is staged most aptly in Adorno's 1961 essay on Beckett, "Trying to Understand Endgame" (*Versuch, nach Endspiel zu Verstehen, NL 1:* 241-75), which allegorizes Beckett's *Endgame* (1958) to dramatize the post-WW2 situation of aesthetics and philosophy. Reading Beckett's text in conjunction with Adorno's critical reading of it provides an allegorical illumination of the bleak interiors of Adorno's thought, demonstrating the ephemeral possibility of both aesthetics and philosophy as a response to crisis.

Beckett's sparse narrative is read by Adorno to describe the "dialectic of enlightenment": the disenchantment and destruction of nature, and a situation in which the "wholly enlightened world is radiant with triumphant calamity" (Adorno, *DE,*1). The philosophical "will to truth" (Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie," 46-7; *Will,* 220-31, 307-327)—its drive for transcendent or eternal meaning—is parodied by Beckett's somber mourning play: "What is eternal and enduring for Beckett is the infinite catastrophe, it is only the fact that the earth is extinguished, though I never saw it lit" (Adorno, *NL II*:

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similarly fractured by aesthetics, which he tries to recuperate philosophically (though ultimately fails). Adorno (and Benjamin) should be seen as much more radical in their invasion of philosophy by way of art and aesthetics.

[44] For Blanchot, in *The Writing of the Disaster* (1980), the disaster is the "limit of writing" (7), that which undermines (or "de-scribes" [7]) the very possibility of its representation. Blanchot's fragments interrogate the impossible possibility of writing catastrophic historical events (such as the Holocaust), events which call for representation, yet also demonstrate the impossibility of ever providing such an adequate representation. More remains to be said on the relation between Adorno and such thinkers of historical judgment, such as Blanchot, Lyotard (in *The Differend* and *Heidegger and 'the Jews'*) and more recently G. Agamben. A tertiary aim of these chapters is to place Adorno in constellation with a large array of contemporary theorists, while recognizing his surprising proximity to many in the tradition of French post-structuralism/deconstruction—namely Foucault and Derrida. Thus, in addition to his unique post-Idealist perspective, Adorno also provides valuable theoretical lenses through which to address contemporary (theoretical) concerns.

273). The bare setting of *Endgame*,[45] with its presupposed *a priori* disaster, presents the spectator with the objective historical situation of both philosophy and art: they exist within a reified context in which there is "no more nature," in which the subjugations of enlightenment have been wholly successful, and in which the totality of the real has become a rational nightmare (Beckett, 11; Adorno, *NL II:* 245, 275). Faced with such circumstances, to hold to something like transcendent meaning (in either philosophy or art) would be nonsensical. If hope exists in such a ruined situation it is fleeting, a "firework" (*AT,* 81), or "ciphers, readable as traces" (*Kierkegaard,* 126, xx, xxii), that is, in allegory and the minor gestures of criticism.

Beckett's *Endgame* begins with the disaster. Nothing more will happen, the characters must only come to an awareness of what has fatedly transpired: "The end is in the beginning and yet you go on (pause)" (Beckett, 69). As the characters attempt to play out their own "endgames," following that in chess,[46] narrative tropes break down and decay as language degenerates to mere sound and eventually an "act without words" (87-91): "let's play it that way...and speak no more about it" (Beckett, 84). The play seems unable to end. A great exhaustion pervades: the characters are impotent to die (in the case of the parents), powerless to exit (in the case of Clov), or unable to finish their soliloquy (in the case of Hamm)—all of which amount to the same thing. Adorno presents

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[45] *Endgame* is set in a grim context—a "bare interior [with] grey light" (Beckett, 1)—framed by two small windows (through which the external disaster is seen). Hamm sits in the center, covered in a sheet; his "assistant" Clov, motionless beside the door; with the two parents (who do not speak) condemned to trash cans behind the main actions (also covered with sheets). Adorno draws attention to the allegorical absurdity of the setting: "The localization of *Endgame* in that zone mocks the spectator with the suggestion of something symbolic, something which, like Kafka, it then withholds" (*NL II:* 251, 239). The characters continually refer to some crisis beyond the stage, which cannot be seen directly, but informs the action: "The end of the world is discounted, as though it could be taken for granted" (*NL II:* 245).

[46] The chess motif (of an "endgame") can be used to illustrate *Endgame's* navigation of necessity and fate: a game of chess can be broken into three segments—openings, middle game, and endgame—as the game advances fewer and fewer possibilities exist. Oftentimes during the "endgame" one is compelled to play out the moves even though the end (the death of the King) is known in advance: "The end is in the beginning and yet you go on (pause)" (*Endgame,* 69). In *Endgame*, the death of the (blind) king (Hamm) and the extinction of all life is foreshadowed throughout: only 4 "pieces" remain on the board. The parents, as pawns, are seen as disposable—literally residing in trash cans. Klov is similarly taken out of play towards the end of the play, leaving only Hamm, who eventually sputters into silence. Beckett's *Catastrophe* (1982) stages a similar play of ending by literalizing the Greek *katastrophien* (*"downturn"*) to lampoon the final act of dramatic action and cathartic culmination (71-81). For the motif of chess as it relates to Benjamin's work, specifically the chess playing automaton in his "Theses on the Concept of History" see Comay "Benjamin's *Endgame*" (251-291).

*Endgame* as staging an "epilogue to subjectivity" (*NL II:* 259), with Hamm portraying a diminished Hamlet— "the last liquidated drama of the subject" (*NL II:* 267)—who gesturally acts out, or "Plays what he no longer is" (*NL II:* 267). After the catastrophe, so- called "man" can no longer be referred to with certainty: "*Endgame* destroys such illusions. The individual himself is revealed to be a historical category...something transient in himself" (Adorno, *NL II:* 149).

Adorno's reading of *Endgame* proceeds along two intertwined vectors which can be unpacked in terms of form and content, though Adorno's critique (and his aesthetics more broadly) seeks to deconstruct such a hard distinction. Following Benjamin's description of the entwinement of form and content in terms of "the pocket," along with Adorno's repeated imperatives regarding the primacy of an analysis of form, a robust distinction between form and content must be problematized (*AT,* 142, 221, 257*; Sociology of Music,* 197).[47] Maintaining the distinction for heuristic purposes, Adorno describes "form" as "sedimented content," a "monadological representation" of a work's natural-historical conditions (*AT,* 5; Robinson, 186-193, 197-9). Art responds to the "puzzles" of "empirical reality"—or the historical-technological material conditions of their time—and must be read critically in relation to these, while not being wholly reduced to them (*AT,* 4-5). In terms of content, Beckett's work stages the imperialist character of enlightenment rationality, allowing the spectator to experience the grim teleology of instrumental reason. With respect to form, Beckett demonstrates the proper "grey" response of art to the disaster (*AT,* 81): artistic mechanisms appear outmoded and exhausted, as his works mourn (and stage) their own inadequacy as language deteriorates into stuttering and noise. Beckett provides a grim testament to Adorno's formalist imperative: "the unsolved antagonisms of reality return as immanent problems of form"

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[47]Benjamin describes the reciprocal "folding" of form and content via the metaphor of a folded sock— "a pocket"—wherein one moment cannot be unpacked without collapsing the whole. As he writes in *Berlin Childhood, "*It taught me that form and content, veil and what is veiled, are the same. It led me to draw truth from works of literature as warily as the child's hand retrieved the sock from 'the pocket'" (*SW 3:* 374). Adorno similarly deconstructs such a hard distinction, as in the *Sociology of Music* he describes the need for a mode of listening that would see "society"—or social forces—as crystalized in musical forms (197). Throughout *AT,* Adorno likewise emphasizes that form should be seen as a coagulation of historical content, the "solution" to specific natural historical aesthetic problematics (6, 173). Adorno also repeatedly advocates for considerations of form as prolegomena to philosophy. See "Theses on the Language of the Philosopher" (35-39).

(*AT,* 6). Beckett's text, along with Adorno's critical supplementation of it, stages Adorno's modernist understanding of both philosophy and art. Neither art nor philosophy can express reality directly in terms of content. Instead, each must strive to refract the real through a reflection on form: mirroring the crises of reality through formal interventions.

The "content" of Beckett's play and Adorno's philosophy as a whole is the disaster. *Endgame* is not a play about character development, individual existential meaning, or the plot, but rather, it is the catastrophe that is given the first and last word. It is about the disaster. Adorno and Beckett elaborate imperatives for philosophy and art following disaster: figuring the ephemeral hope for both domains amidst the crises of Modernity, capitalism, politics, and ecology. In the context of *Endgame*, Adorno is highly critical of the responses of existentialism (specifically the French employment of Beckett's work by Sartre, [*NL II:* 241, 249]), which upheld the possibility of existential freedom, along with an agential notion of the subject in the face of the catastrophe.[48] Further, as Adorno points out throughout his oeuvre, existentialism does not *write* in an "existential" manner: despite its lived and absurdist topics (on the level of content), it refuses to incorporate such existential themes on the level of form (*ND,* 49-51; *AT,* 242; Sherman, 75-78).[49] Beckett's work spoofs the subjective agency of existentialism, "In Beckett history swallows up existentialism," which "itself is parodied; nothing remains of its invariant categories but *bare existence*" (*NL II:* 243). Beckett lampoons existentialist attempts at writing the catastrophe: existentialism's "invariant categories" must cleave to the greater facticity of historical givenness. Against existentialism, Adorno holds to the mute language of art—and the critical thought images of aesthetics—as vehicles which allow "suffering to speak" (*ND,* 17): art critically mourns its own situation as a "useless

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[48] Despite Adorno's criticisms of Sartre, the two thinkers converge on several points, most notably in their shared attempt to think through a revised dialectical conception of philosophy in light of the events of the twentieth-century. See, Sherman, *Sartre and Adorno* (1-13, 75-77, 237-80). Adorno's main criticisms of Sartre come in his 1962 essay "Commitment" (*NL II:* 76-94) in which he criticizes Sartre's understanding of the committed writer (in *What is Literature?*), advocating instead for his own modernist primacy of the autonomous work. In *ND* (49-51)*,* Adorno critiques existentialism more broadly for lapsing into Idealism by way of its primacy of subjective freedom, ignoring the facticity of its historical-material context.

[49] For more on the notion of an "existential writing," or a form of writing which embodies the plethora of existential experience [*Erfahrung*], see V. Cristache, *Bastard Reasoning* (2018)*,* specifically, Ch. 1, "What is an Existential Writing?" (43-80) and Ch. 6, "On Second Reading" (257-301).

object" (within the capitalist marketplace), presenting a refracted heterotopic image that things could be otherwise. As Adorno writes: "If the Subject is no longer able to speak directly, then at least it should…speak through things, through their alienated and mutilated form" (*AT,* 118, 78). In terms of the politics of art, Adorno prefers the responses of aesthetic modernism, counterposed to "committed"[50] or explicitly political art, the former of which commences with a questioning of art's formal mechanisms and their adequacy in the face of given reality: it provokes reflection without lapsing into mere propaganda (or the identity thinking of the "culture industry").[51]

Adorno positions *Endgame* as satirizing enlightenment notions of "progress" which would see Kant's "crooked timber of humanity" made straight by enlightenment self-mastery ("Universal History," 46-47). Instead, for Adorno, enlightenment became enamored with its own ideals, hopelessly tortured by its repressed other, mythology: "the telos of the dynamic of every-same is the disaster; Beckett's writings look this in the eye" (*AT,* 224; *NL II:* 241-2; cf. *DE,* 1-34). Following Hegel, "enlightenment" remained dialectically entwined and defined in opposition to its other, "superstition" (*PS,* 329-55), a struggle which turned over into the "terror" of the French Revolution—enlightenment became what it opposed, domination (*PS,* 357-62). "Universal history" is a history of control and imperialism, the enlightenment taming of nature has few possible outcomes: "No universal history leads from savagery to humanitarianism, but there is one leading from the slingshot to the megaton bomb" (*ND,* 320).[52] However, Adorno sees critique as

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[50] For Adorno, committed, or political art degrades art to mere propaganda which denies the thought-provoking critical aspect of the work of art: "commitment often means bleating what everyone is already saying or at least secretly wants to hear" (*NL II:* 93). Stressing the migration of politics from committed to autonomous art Adorno will write: "This is not a time for political works of art, but politics has migrated to autonomous works, and nowhere more so than where these seem politically dead" (*NL II:* 93-4). For more on Adorno's notion of political art, see his 1962 essay "Commitment." *NL II:* 76-94.

[51] The term "culture industry" arises from Adorno and Horkheimer's infamous "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," and describes "Entertainment [a]s the prolongation of work under late capitalism" (*DE,* 109). That is, in late capitalism, popular culture acts as a mechanized industry which produces standardized commodities for standardized consumers (*DE,* 95, 103, 112, 125). I wish to extend this definition to encompass works of art which fail to provoke critical reflection in spectators, or works which foreclose the possibility of aesthetic supplementation.

[52] On this point one might offer a rejoinder to Adorno, specifically related to the fatalist determinism of his descriptions of the disaster: does Adorno deny humans the same agency that could provide the key to their emancipation? Further, throughout the 1960s Adorno championed a conventional "apocalyptic" narrative of the nuclear catastrophe (exemplified by the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*): reason dominates nature, we are unable to see the mythological elements of this, we (as nature) are also dominated, thus are own reason will

continuing a cosmopolitan project of reason: "rationalization is not yet rational...so long as progress deformed by utilitarianism does violence to the surface of earth" (*AT*, 64). Art, along with its philosophical interpretation (in aesthetics), must play a leading role in in providing a "running commentary on reason," allowing for philosophy's re-imagination and possible expansion (Hammer, *Modernism,* 44). In this manner, Adorno redeems a minimal notion of progress, one animated by a simple ethical sensitivity in the face of the disaster: "progress would be the very establishment of humanity in the first place, whose prospect opens up in the face of its extinction" ("Progress," 128).[53] Art and philosophy must also play a negative role in denouncing compensatory ideological utopian visions. Adorno describes "the affirmative moment of art" as a "utopia as well as the lie that utopia is here now" (*Sociology of Music*, 224). Beckett's text denounces the progressive hopes of enlightenment, but in so doing holds open the possibility of a more perfect model of reason. It is a narrative of progress based on "natural history," which, as will be elaborated throughout this project, stresses, ruin, incompleteness, and particularity against the violent abstractions of "universal history" (*ND,* 300-7).

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*inevitably,* destroy itself through the creation of new techniques for the domination of nature. Especially with respect to our current climate crisis, such theses have been empirically borne out. However, the problem is that we are still here, living on in Adorno's so-called disaster. Though many will argue the worst is *still to come*, we still must live and exist within our present crisis. Put otherwise, the disaster should not be externalized as some final eschaton or *telos* we are moving towards, but rather as an immanent process occurring and being acted out today in a gradual manner. Such apocalyptic rhetoric of climate catastrophe has been criticized by thinkers such as Anna Tsing from the anthropological domain. Her work seeks to chart the "patchy" networks and collisions of late capitalism, those moments which manage to live, despite the disaster. For Tsing (in *The Mushroom at the End of the World*), such overarching critiques of progress occlude an awareness of "third nature" (vis-à-vis Adorno and Lukács), and the "patchy" networks of late capitalism—the new modes of life and temporality created through human and species interaction with their environment. Tsing's provisos lead to to further questions as to how one may most aptly write or conceptualize the disaster, along with the possible limits of pessimism as a philosophical perspective. Describing here own notion of "third nature" as a rejoinder to the Lukácsian-Adornian notion of "second nature" (world of capitalist convention), Tsing will write: "My book offers 'third nature,' that is, what manages to live despite capitalism. To even notice third nature, we must evade assumptions that the future is that singular direction ahead. Like virtual particles in a quantum field, multiple futures pop in and out of possibility; third nature emerges within such temporal polyphony. Yet progress stories have blinded us. To know the world without them, this book sketches open-ended assemblages of entangled ways of life, as these coalesce in coordination across many kinds of temporal rhythm" (*Mushroom*, xii).

[53] Describing his refashioning of "progress" around the notion of critique, Adorno writes: "Progress means: to step out of the magic spell, even out of the spell of progress, which is itself nature, in that humanity becomes aware of its own inbred nature and brings to a halt the domination its exacts upon nature and through which domination by nature continues. In this way it could be said that progress occurs where it ends" ("Progress," 134).

Formally, Adorno's essay "*Versuch, das Endspiel zu Verstehen"* provides several imperatives for the practice of philosophy. In German, "*Versuchen*" (along with *der Versuch*) has a vast constellation of meanings covered over by the English rendering "Trying": connoting at once "to attempt," "to try," "trial," "to experiment," and "essay."[54] In this way, one could render Adorno's text "Essay on understanding (*Endgame*)" in which what is aimed at is not some final reading of Beckett's text, but rather, a parody of the notion of "understanding." Throughout the essay, Adorno illustrates that what is in crisis in Beckett's work is the stability of this "understanding" itself: "Understanding [*Endgame*] can mean nothing other than understanding its incomprehensibility" (*NL II*: 243). Understanding is not something arrived at once and for all, but rather, an ongoing and reflexively critical exercise of supplementation: "Understanding and criticism are one" (*AT,* 262). Both the philosophical and literary dimensions of such a critique of "understanding" should be noted: with regard to the latter, Adorno refuses a final interpretation, or "understanding," of Beckett's text; while with regard to the former, Adorno questions the a-historical stability of philosophy, opening thought's eternal categories to the transience of history. Adorno's essay form is inaugurated by a shattering of the fixity of the understanding, grounding thought upon the unstable ground of subjective precarity (and pathology).

Great works of art—such as those of Beckett, Kafka, Schoenberg, and Beethoven—do not provide catharsis, or a stable message which can be straightforwardly decoded, but rather, they provoke a "shudder" [*Erschütterung*] in the stability of the subject: "The shock aroused by important works... is the moment of being shaken. The recipients lose their footing" (*AT,* 245). Such a "shudder" is "radically opposed to the conventional idea of experience [*Erlebnis*] and provides no particular satisfaction for the I... Rather, it is a memento of the liquidation of the I, which, shaken, perceives its own limitedness and

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[54] The French verb "essayer" (along with the substantive "essay") contains the same connotations as the German "*Versuchen*," eliciting at once "to try," "to experiment," along with "essay." Montaigne—the thinker of "the essay" par excellence—puts this affinity to the test, opposing the subjective precarity of the essay to the stability of metaphysical or scientific thought: "I study myself more than anything else. That is my metaphysics, that is my physics" ("Of Experience," 816). For more on the critical potential of Montaigne for critical social theory see, Horkheimer, "Montaigne and the function of Skepticism" (in *Philosophy and Social Science,* 265-312).

finitude" (*AT,* 245; *GS 7.* 363: 4320-1). Authentic works demonstrate the possibility of what Adorno terms "metaphysical experience" [*Erfahrung*] that is, monumental experiences (or "events") which—opposed to the "conventional idea of experience" [*Erlebnis*]— prompt a critical reflection upon the constitutive elements of philosophy, provoking the formulation of new modes of judgments which strive to "use the concept in order to reach beyond the concept" (*Lectures ND,* 95). Philosophy must critically follow art, while not wholly reducing itself to it, employing aesthetic allegories to transcend the limitations of discursive modes of thinking (*ND,* 15). For Adorno, in light of the disasters of his century, philosophy can no longer proceed as a conventionally systematic endeavour. Instead, it must fracture its stability on the level of form, becoming "essayistic": "[the essay] thinks in fragments, just as reality is fragmentary, and finds its unity in and through the breaks and not by glossing them over" (*NL I:*16). Essayistic thought does not commence with the stable grounded subject, but rather, it begins with a subjectivity that has been made to "shudder," one that has had the experience [*Erfahrung*], of "the liquidation of the I." Philosophy must begin with the experimental "essay(er)," incorporating crisis into the very form of thought, coming to terms with its constitutive finitude. The disaster must be formally staged, not presented as some mere thematic moment in the content of the work. Adorno underscores this "tentative experimental" quality of philosophical inquiry, which must strive after "changing trial arrangements": "I believe that what characterizes philosophical thinking is an element of the tentative experimental and inconclusive, and this is what distinguishes it from the positive sciences" (*AP,* 131; *Lectures ND,* 5).

According to Adorno, "Auschwitz has irrefutably proven the failure of culture" (*ND,* 359). One cannot return nostalgically to some golden age, going "back to culture," in a traditional sense, nor can one placate oneself in any authentic culture unmarred by the horrors of the twentieth-century. Auschwitz provided the "Lisbon earthquake" for philosophy (to adapt Voltaire on Leibniz): if something like the Holocaust was possible, one does not live in the "best of all possible worlds" (*Metaphysics,* 105; *ND,* 361). In terms of thought, for Adorno, philosophy could no longer rest content in a-historical abstraction. Instead, it must "look the negative in the face" (Hegel, *PS,* 18), attempting to theorize from crisis as opposed to in abstraction from it. Responding to what Esposito

terms the "crisis *dispositif*" (2-4, 19-29) uniting much of twentieth-century thought, Adorno sees philosophy as always already shot through and refuted by the atrophies of the century. As such, Adorno's philosophy becomes a "tragic" enterprise: a "necrology," which "lives on" despite the *a priori* awareness of its inevitable failure (*AT,* 4; *ND,* 3; Esposito, 8-9).

Throughout his aesthetics, Adorno repeatedly describes what I will term the "(hetero)-autonomous" character of the work of art: great modernist artists (such as Beckett or Kafka) understand the historical index of the "autonomous work," and as such, mourn the inadequacy of the medium to ever provide a complete articulation of its object.[55] For Adorno, art and philosophy can exist after crisis, provided they come to terms with their own "death" (Hegel, *A,* 11). Adorno repeatedly emphasizes the natural-historical situation of autonomous works within "society," while not wholly reducing such works to their material historical context (*AT,* 17, 225-60). Great artists, such as Beethoven, but also Kant and Hegel, possess a bourgeois duality: they are unquestionably shaped by their historical context—providing situated "solutions to problems," to the "puzzles" posed by the artistic material of their particular historical epoch (*Sociology of Music,* 213; *AT,* 5)—while also transcending their situation, delivering generalizable concepts of freedom through their labour on artistic forms. Great autonomous works project a transient image of a reconciled humanity—via an emancipated form of "social labour"—the freedom of great works foreshadowing a greater concept of freedom in reality: "absolute freedom in art... comes into contradiction with the perennial un-freedom of the whole" (*AT,* 1-2, 200, 224-5, 227, 236, 77; *CM,* 10). Adorno similarly describes philosophy as a "vestige of freedom" against the un-freedom of the capitalist

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[55] Describing the antithetical relationship of art to society, Adorno writes: "Art's a-sociality is the determinate negation of a determinate society" (*AT,* 226). Further, elaborating the "un-social sociability" of art with respect to society: "[Art] becomes social by its opposition to society, and it occupies this position only as autonomous art. By crystalizing in itself as something unique to itself, rather than complying with existing social norms and qualifying as 'socially useful,' it criticizes society as merely existing" (*AT*, 225-6). However, Adorno should not be considered a crude materialist who reduces all culture to its economic conditions. In relation to music's relation to society, Adorno speaks of autonomous music bearing the "mark of Cain," that is, of being invariably shaped by its historical-material context, while not wholly reducible to it (*Sociology of Music,* 204-5). Composers such a Beethoven, demonstrate a freedom in art that anticipates its utopian realization in reality: "the freedom of art, its independence of the demands made on it, is founded on the idea of a free society, and in a sense anticipates its realization" (*Ibid.,* 221, 209). For more on autonomous art as a figure of autonomous humanity, see *AT* (1-2).

whole (*CM,* 10). Philosophical criticism seeks to capture such utopian impulses, or notions of freedom, dormant in previous forms of art (or objects)—as Benjamin did with the detritus of nineteenth-century Paris in *The Arcades*—employing past conceptions to critically intervene in contemporary reflections.

The negative dialectic follows art (and aesthetics) while not being wholly reducible to it, and one can thus see the natural-historical situation of art as mirroring that of philosophy (*ND,* 15). Art (as a lower domain of Hegelian absolute spirit) provides a framework through which philosophy can understand its useless situation in late capitalism. Negative dialectics stresses the perpetual inadequacy of conceptual cognition: philosophy can never do full justice to its object, and critical reflection must aid philosophy in coming to terms with this constitutive lack, leading to a recognition of the fundamental "primacy of the object" (*ND,* 5, 183-97). Adorno accentuates negative philosophies and forms of art which emphasize their discordance, or tension with extant reality, perspectives "that distort existing reality" via critique, revealing the "impossible possibility" of a differential order of things (*MM,* 247).

Animated by crisis, philosophy must *a priori* abandon the possibility "that the power of thought is sufficient to grasp the totality of the real" (*AP*, 120). Instead, philosophy should strive to "distort existing reality" through the practice of critique, creating "thought-images" or "prisms" through which to reflect upon, while refracting, existing reality, such that it might be imagined in alternative directions (*ND,* 56-57; *MM,* 247).[56] For Adorno philosophy can be thought of as "actual," provided it dispense with its Idealist systematic intention of grasping the totality of "the real" by way of

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[56] Describing his model of the negative dialectic via the motif of the "prism," Adorno will write: "To want substance in cognition is to want a utopia. It is this consciousness of possibility that sticks to the concrete, the undisfigured. Utopia is blocked off by possibility, never by immediate reality; this is why it seems abstract in the midst of extant things. The inextinguishable color comes from nonbeing. Thought is its servant, a piece of existence extending—however negatively—to that which is not. The utmost distance alone would be proximity; philosophy is the prism in which its colour is caught" (*ND,* 56-57). Elaborating this negative dialectical perspective, while describing his immanent model of utopianism, Adorno concludes his essay "Critique": "the false, if known determinately refracts an index of what is right and better" (*CM,* 288). Adorno is further emphatic that "Philosophy cannot survive without linguistic effort" (*ND,* 56); that is, through the creation of dialectical linguistic images philosophy "expresses" reality negatively: "Dialectics—literally: language as the organon of thought...to attempt a critical rescue of the rhetorical element, a mutual approximation of thing and expression, to the point where the difference fades" (*ND,* 56).

("rational") conceptual thought. Philosophy should instead endeavor to expose "the real" in experimental directions, exploring the possibility of differing intellectual relationships with the natural world through kaleidoscopic approaches to the intellectual tradition.[57] Adorno's early lectures, "The Actuality of Philosophy" (1931) and "The Idea of Natural History" (1932), demonstrate his novel commitment to a truly dialectical-historical model of philosophy. In characteristic fashion, Adorno's own philosophical commitments are elucidated negatively through an immanent critique of his philosophical contemporaries, notably the phenomenological ontology of Husserl and Heidegger, along with the aesthetic criticism of Benjamin and Lukács (*NH*, 255-64). For Adorno, philosophy cannot appeal to any a-historical "givenness": some pure origin of thought, be it "nature," or transcendental consciousness, which Adorno broadly glosses under the heading "myth" (*NH*, 253). Nor can philosophy commence in a purely historical manner, following Nietzsche or historical materialism, simply asserting all philosophical concepts to be historical instantiations of "discourse" (*NH*, 256-7). Instead, Adornian philosophy begins dialectically by mediating "nature" and "history" by way of their identity-in-difference, locating a shared notion of "transience (*Vergänglichkeit*)" subtending both terms (*NH*, 262-264). Moving against ontology, or any "natural" starting point for philosophy, Adorno begins with what Schelling termed "the groundless ground" (*FE*, 68-70):  a natural-historical transience subtending both nature and history (*NH*, 252, 260, 262-3, 268-9). Adorno's embrace of transience turns the constitutive precarity of philosophy into a strength, grounding philosophy on a historical allegorical awareness, resisting the foundational mythologies of philosophy (as will be argued in 1.3).

In his essay "Cultural Criticism and Society" ("*Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft*," 1951), which opens the collection *Prisms*, Adorno questions the meaning of "cultural criticism," exploring the relationship between cultural critique and social malaise by way of a deconstruction of the positions of the "transcendent" and "immanent" critic.[58] These

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[57] Adorno deconstructs and rethinks the Hegelian *Dopplesatz* (double-dictum, [*Right,* 20]) between the "real" and "rational," examining new modes by which each term can influence the other, or how thought can influence reality, and reality can in turn influence philosophy.

[58] Adorno himself favours the latter position: the critic must employ an immanent perspective which allows for further reflection (and hence "unfolding") of the work—the success of critique should be judged to the extent it is able to provoke further reflection with respect to the work. For more on Adorno's immanent

critical theses can be extended to describe Adorno's general provisos for any philosophy following the disaster, one transformed into the minoritarian practice of criticism. In this way (for Adorno) "cultural criticism" should be rendered as "philosophy." "Transcendent criticism" approaches the object or text of criticism with pre-established static categories which are simply "applied" to the text, while "immanent critique" works within the text, immanently (re)fashioning critical perspectives using the textual means at hand and employing dynamic historical hermeneutic categories. Following these theoretical considerations, the text concludes with Adorno's (in)famous disclaimer regarding "poetry after Auschwitz," as he writes:

> The more total society becomes, the greater the reification of the mind and the more paradoxical its effort to escape reification on its own. Even the most extreme consciousness of doom threatens to degenerate into idle chatter. Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism. To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today. Absolute reification, which presupposed intellectual progress as one of its elements, is now preparing to absorb the mind entirely. Critical intelligence cannot be equal to this challenge as long as it confines itself to self- satisfied contemplation. (*Prisms,* 34; *GS:* 10.1. S: 30)

Adorno's statements invite and provoke a polyphony of interpretations, none of which is the literal reading (that one should *not write* poetry),[59] and one should note the violence done Adorno's broader argument when the statement— "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric"—is presented in isolation. Adorno's polemic—especially in constellation with Benjamin's assertion "There is no document of culture which is not at the same time

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model of critique, see "The Essay as Form," which will be explored in greater depth later in this chapter (1.4.1). Hegel also employs a philosophical understanding of immanent critique, in which his dialectical method positions systems of thought as moments in the broader unfolding of truth, as he writes: "Effective refutation must infiltrate the opponent's stronghold and confront him on his own ground; there is no point in attacking him outside his territory and claiming jurisdiction where he is not" *SOL,* 512. Hegel continually distances himself from the "empty formalism" of previous philosophies (namely Kant and Spinoza), who, according to Hegel "want to have cognition *before* we have any is as absurd as the wise resolve of the Scholasticus to *learn to swim before he ventured into the water"* (*EL*, 34). Against such views, Hegel forwards his own dialectical model of thought which necessitates a performative unity between method and content (*PS,* 52-53, 56-7, 487, 88; cf. *SOL,* 31-36). See further, Ng (96-9, 121). For Adorno's notion of immanent critique in relation to deconstruction and Derrida, see Dews (38-44).

[59] Elaborating on this statement in his 1965 *Metaphysics: Concepts and Problems,* Adorno will write: "I would readily concede that, just as I said that after Auschwitz one *could not* write poems—by which I meant to point to the hollowness of the resurrected culture of that time—it could equally well be said, on the other hand, that one *must* write poems, in keeping with Hegel's statement in his *Aesthetics* that as long as there is an awareness of suffering among human beings there must also be art as the objective form of that awareness" (*Metaphysics,* 110).

a document of barbarism" (*SW 4:* 392)–gestures towards an awareness of the "barbarism" at the heart of culture. Adorno and Benjamin continually remind us that the progress of "enlightened" culture has in fact been a slaughter bench of barbarous domination: "history is not the soil in which happiness grows. The periods of happiness in it are the blank pages of history" (Hegel, *World History,* 79).[60]

Adorno's claims should be read as imperatives for a negative poetics, one which would jettison the idealistic or compensatory elements of poetry, and instead treat art allegorically as "a ruin." The cultural-historical impetus for Adorno's proclamations was Paul Celan's 1948 "Death Fugue," which (for Adorno) excessively harmonized the experience of the camps, negating the potential for a transformative and dissonant aesthetic experience.[61] For Adorno, art (and philosophy) cannot return to culture as some idealized eternal store of value, but rather, must begin with the recognition that "All post-Auschwitz culture, including its urgent critique, is garbage" (*ND,* 367). One must commence with the ruin of history and the catastrophe of givenness, with the "single catastrophe," or the "wreckage upon wreckage" that is seen by Benjamin's *Angelus Novus* (*SW 4*: 392). Following Benjamin, it is precisely this "fissured" or ruined quality of the past which is of service to critical historiography: it is those incomplete, or non-identical, moments that allow the past to be endowed with hope by way of the present as they can become "citable" in relation to its concerns (*SW 4:* 389, 395-6). For Benjamin, such occurrences are "the revolutionary moments in the occurrence of history. The places where tradition breaks off—hence its peaks and crags, which offer footing to one who would cross over them" (*Arcades,* 474). Such moments are "revolutionary" in that they can enter into constellation with the "now," "blasting open the continuum of the history"

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[60] Such theses are echoed by Brecht, in his poem "Questions from a Worker Who Reads," which allows one to theorize the dialectic of "culture and barbarism," via its gloss of "culture" as driven by the barbaric labour of the many: "Each page a victory//At whose expense the victory ball? //Every ten years a great man, Who paid the bill? //So many reports// So Many Questions" (252-3).

[61] Adorno seems to have objected to the poem's lyrical quality, in which the form (of the fugue or waltz) covers over the dissonance of the content (the gas chambers and camps). For Adorno, poetry must fracture itself through paratactic gestures in order to emphasize its inadequate or incomplete quality with respect to its content. For more on this, see "On Lyric Poetry and Society" (1957) and "Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Style" (1963/4). Despite the disagreement between Adorno and Celan with respect to "Todesfuge," the two share remarkable affinities on the relationship between aesthetics and the catastrophes of the twentieth century and more remains to be said regarding the relation(s) between Adorno and Celan.

revealing new potentials latent in the present moment when it cites the past in relation to itself (*SW 4*: 395). Likewise, for Adorno, crisis provides an occasion through which to reflect upon the tradition of philosophy, imagining how it might be cited as "actual" in relief with his present moment.

According to Adorno, philosophy must enact a "critical self-reflection…before the highest peaks of history" (*ND,* 3-4): thought must reflect on its own time and the role that its categories play in upholding the world ideologically as it is, while warding off the "wrong life" or various forms of totalitarianism through contestatory critique (*MM,* 15-18; Butler, 55-61). [62] This requires that philosophy remain essentially open to "metaphysical experience" [*geistige*(*n*) *Erfahrung*], that is, occurrences that prompt a fundamental revision of its concepts and categories (*ND,* 361-408 // 39, 52, 61).[63] Thought should attempt to express discursively what "lies outside of philosophy... [which] must attempt to get outside itself while using the same conceptual language that blocks all the exits" (Esposito, 7-8).

Adorno's positions contain two materialist imperatives for thought that are employed to short circuit Idealism: the first, that theory should take its cue from the real material relationships of history and practice (following Lukács, *Consciousness,* 223-255). The second, that philosophy has a compensatory, or ideological, function, which affirms reality and social structures as they are, occluding insight into the material basis of ideas, while obscuring the ability of labour (both physical and mental) to shape reality otherwise than it currently manifests. For Adorno, it is a given that philosophy contains subterranean elements of its material social circumstance, and the task of criticism entails locating philosophical texts within a "force-field" of material social assumptions and influences, while not wholly reducing thought to such forces (*NL 1:*13; *AT,* 205; *Kant,* 4).

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[62] Further stressing the historical necessity of a turn towards historical materialism (from Idealism), Adorno will write: "This course of history forces materialism upon metaphysics, traditionally the direct antithesis of materialism" (*ND,* 365).

[63] Forster describes metaphysical experience as the self-aware movement beyond the narrow epistemological conception of philosophy, "*Geistige Erfahrung* rescinds the dissolution of experience in epistemological inquiry by using the subject to recover the expressive element of epistemological concepts" (90-1, see further, 83-4, 2). Adorno describes *Negative Dialectics* as the working of of a "*Theorie der gestigen Erfahrung*" (*ND [German],* 39, cf. 52, 20, 55 171, 189).

According to Adorno, this second imperative beckons philosophical critique to reflect on the moments within its methods and procedures which uphold the given status quo as ideology, reading philosophy archeologically as a "cipher" to its material historical circumstances and unconscious suppositions (*Kierkegaard*, 1-4, 126-127). Adorno reads philosophical positions such as phenomenology or existentialism as fetishizing unencumbered subjective agency, commencing with a "bourgeois interior" out of touch with the historical-material movements of its time (*Kierkegaard*, 53-59, 92-3, 106-8; *ND,* 49-51). The systems of positivism valorize scientific objectivity—or a "view from nowhere"—failing to consider the role of scientific discourse in upholding systems of oppression (*DE,* 19, 23, 71-72; *AT,* 265-7; *ND,*140-141).[64] Adorno's Kierkegaard study illustrates the materialist moment in his post-Idealism. Adorno is highly critical of Kierkegaard's "bourgeois" lapse into a "realism without reality" along with the "objectless inwardness" of his existential decisions which, despite their claims to philosophically articulate "individual experience," remain out of touch with their natural-historical index (27-30, 40-9, 106, 115), Thus, despite his "attempted breakout" from the bad abstractions of Idealism, according to Adorno, Kierkegaard remains a speculative Idealist thinker. However, following Benjamin, Adorno emphasizes the "allegorical" hope that exists in reading superficially "natural" elements in Kierkegaard's texts such as the Bourgeois "interior" (40-6), as "ciphers" or "traces" (126-7), which can be opened by way of historical transience.[65]

For Adorno, history is a catastrophic ruin—a "slaughter- bench at which the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of States, and the virtue of individuals have been

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[64] Describing positivism's destruction of experience, Adorno writes: "The regimented experience prescribed by positivism nullifies experience itself and, in its intention, eliminates the experiencing subject...As a social phenomenon, positivism is geared towards the human type devoid of experience and continuity, and it encourages [the subject] to see himself as the crown of creation" (*The Positivist Dispute,* 57-8).

[65] The Benjaminian affinities of Adorno's *Kierkegaard* study have been noted, most prominently by Benjamin himself (*SW 2:* 703-5), who prophetically remarked apropos of the text: "This book contains much in a small space. The author's subsequent writings may someday emerge from it" (*SW 2:* 705; see, *Adorno-Benjamin,* 20-26). As Benjamin decodes the historical sentiment of the Baroque by way of allegory and natural history, Adorno deciphers Kierkegaard's subterranean Idealism— "this world of images whose labyrinths and halls contain Kierkegaard's innermost experiences (*SW 2:* 704)—by way of his critical-historical analysis, such that "Kierkegaard's inward spirituality is assigned a specific place in history and society" (*ibid.*).

victimized" (Hegel, *History,* 24)—and one which continually elicits ethical imperatives for thought: philosophy has an obligation to write and think the disaster. As Adorno proclaims, "to give a voice to suffering… is the condition of truth" (*ND,* 17).  This is to say: suffering, torture and crisis should not be rationalized, nor allowed to pass without a philosophical response. Adorno will go further, claiming that the events of Auschwitz have imposed upon thought a "new categorical imperative" (*ND,* 365, 285-6): one must rearrange one's thoughts, along with philosophical concept and categories, such that atrocities such as Auschwitz will not repeat themselves. Instead of shying away from crisis, for Adorno, philosophy must embrace historical dissonance as an occasion for the critical renewal of thought. Crisis reminds philosophy that "rationalization is not yet rational" (*AT,* 64): work remains to be done to develop models of reason that could enact a real vision of utopia (*ND,* 11), while striving to reconnect humans with the natural world (*AT,* 64-72).[66]

## 1.3   Natural History: A Philosophy of Transience (Adorno and Nature)

> Nature
> What have you done
> For me
> (that I could not do to you)?
> Jeff Dergson, *The Vestiges,*13.

This section will examine Adorno's constellation of "natural history"—or his metaphysics of "transience as an originary history of signification" (*NH,* 263)—in relation to which any possible philosophy after the disaster must be constructed.  Adorno formulates the dialectical image "natural history" to denaturalize previous conceptions of the position of nature in the philosophical system, while providing the metaphysical grounding for his own ruined understanding of philosophy. In his 1932 address to the Frankfurt *Kantgesellschaft,* "On the Idea of Natural History," Adorno develops his own "ontological reorientation of the philosophy of history," via the critical constellation of

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[66] The ethical-somatic moment of Adorno's expansion of rationality should be highlighted. Adorno stresses the "new categorical imperative" (*ND,* 365) imposed upon philosophy by the atrocities of the twentieth-century, forcing it to become more empathetic and attuned to somatic embodiment and bodily suffering. Describing Adorno's expansion of reason, Bernstein writes: "for Adorno, to expand reason is to expand the scope and character of cognitive life, of knowing. It is towards a more capacious sense of cognition and thus reason that Adorno's struggles with the concept leads us" (*Disenchantment,* 4).

"natural history" (259-260). Natural history serves at once as a dialectical heuristic—or "historical image" (*AP,* 131)—through which to de-mythologize previous systems of thought, while also providing the transient metaphysic (following Benjamin), or *Ungrund* (following Schelling) upon which any possible philosophy of *Spirit* would be erected.

In the lecture, Adorno describes his aim as the dialectical mediation of "the usual antithesis of history and nature"; that is, the two terms are decoded by way of their opposition, and one is invited to consider the "natural" or pathological character of historical processes, along with the historical construction of "nature" (*NH,* 252). In denaturalizing terms such as "nature" and "history" by way of his "historical philosophical method" (*NH,* 260),[67] Adorno moves against the fundamental ontology of Heidegger in vogue at the time, which hypostasized both history, by way of "*Dasein's* historicity," and nature, by way of Heidegger's longing for "equiprimordial" concepts (see, *Being &Time,* 13, 141-3*; NH,* 256-9). As a dialectical heuristic, natural history seeks to destabilize both nature and history, while positively providing a truly transient-allegorical starting point for philosophy (*NH,* 263-265, 269; Pensky, 228-30). Following Hegel, philosophy must attempt to dispense with all presuppositions—especially those considered "natural" or "immediate"—instead commencing with the dialectical interplay between nature and history, ideal and real, empirical and transcendental. Adorno's interventions can be seen as akin to Schelling's revised version of "the copula," in which terms are shown to be mediated and defined by way of their opposition to each other: "freedom" is demarcated and understood only by working through the tensions of its opposite, "necessity" (*FE,* 13-17). For Adorno, history is the manifestation of natural pathologies, while what is seemingly natural is historical through and through (*NH,* 252-5). Such a "transient" starting point for philosophy allows Adorno to avoid the pitfalls of conceptual subjugation enacted by static models of discursive "identity-thinking": modes of thought which favor sameness and reproducibility, suppressing difference and

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[67] For Adorno, such a method simply insists that "the[se] concepts did not fall from heaven" (*NH,* 260), that is, that the meaning of such terms contains a historically sedimented dimension, or "truth content." Describing the critical heuristic power of natural history, Adorno writes, "For radical natural-historical thought, however, everything existing transforms itself into ruins and fragments, into just such a charnel house where signification is discovered, in which nature and history interweave and the philosophy of history is assigned the task of their intentional interpretation" (*NH,* 265).

particularity (*NH,* 263-7; *ND,* 5, 11). Natural history provides a rebuke to conventional enlightenment historicism, which sees history as the manifestation of natural providence. Instead, natural history provides a vision of history (and nature) centered on "ruin and trauma," on "allegory," rather than "enlightenment" (Rajan, "Natural history," 187-8; Adorno, *ND,* 300-8).

Adorno's metaphysical epistemological thesis of the "primacy of the object" (*ND,* 183-97) has further ecological efficacy for rethinking the concept of "nature," which, for Adorno, functions as a "mediated placeholder for immediacy" (*AT,* 62; Cook, *Nature,* 11 121). Adorno refuses to uphold "nature" as some authentic given, or primordial substratum; instead, he dialectically mediates "nature," by way of its opposite, "history" (*NH,* 252-3). Thus "natural history" recognizes the reciprocal mediation of both terms (along with that between subject and object), seeing both as subtended by an "original history of transience," or with Schelling, an *Ungrund,* or "groundless ground" (*NH,* 262-263; *FE,* 29)*.* Though there is an evident Hegelian basis for Adorno's thought of nature— specifically in his broader refashioning of "the concept," which Adorno defines as a dialectical opposition between "identity and non-identity" (*ND,* 11-12; *Kant*, 66) — his philosophy of nature also draws heavily on the work of Kant, Freud, and Marx, while entering into an implicit thematic affinity with Schelling with his contestation of mere enlightenment understandings of nature (as will be shown in Ch. 5.).

Cook and O'Connor view Adorno as presenting a negative dialectic constellation of Marx, Kant, and Freud in elaborating a "critical materialism" (critical being taken in the Kantian sense), which continually undercuts "the fallacy of constitutive subjectivity" by recognizing the irreducibility of nature to whatever the subject makes of it (*ND,* xx, 1- 11; O'Connor, 15, 83-5, 118, 126, 173; Cook, *Nature,* 11, 30-3). The critical Kantian moment in Adorno's thought highlights the fundamental "block," or "non-identity," of thought (the concept) in relationship to its object (nature), the recognition of the "primacy of the object," that "objects do not go into their concepts without leaving some remainder" (*ND,* 5; *Kant,* 170-80; Cook, *Nature,* 30, 37). For Adorno, nature remains a perpetual "indivisible remainder," which can never be fully assimilated into thought. A further Kantian element to Adorno's thought lies in his maintenance of a modified

version of the "thing-in-itself" (as "non-identity"), along with a recognition of the central mediatory role played by the epistemic subject in the constitution of reality.

Adorno's employment of Freud and psychoanalysis more broadly introduces a notion of pathological-historical genesis into the static Kantian subject, providing what Adorno terms a "remembrance of nature in the subject," or with Schelling, a "natural history of the mind" (*DE,* 32; *Ideas,* 30). Psychoanalysis provides a model for the "(non) reconciliation" of the subject with "nature"—be it one's own or the external world—one must recognize that no such immediate access exists to either domain (Cook, *Nature,* 25-27). *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* psychoanalytically maps the emergence of enlightenment subjectivity as a sacrificial form of repression and mastery, both of instincts (internal nature), and external nature (*DE,* 1-34).

In the famous gloss of Odysseus, Adorno and Horkheimer chart the interpellation of "bourgeois" subjectivity as a form of mythological "sacrifice," mirroring the dominating character of the enlightenment more broadly (*DE,* 35-50; Cook, *Nature,* 65-66; Sherratt, 80-96, 93-102). In a Hegelian reversal, enlightenment's drive for sovereign mastery begets its own negation, as the master is revealed as a slave to its own desire for control: "reason" can only articulate itself through the subjugation of its "mythological" other, nature (*PS,* 114-9). In recognizing the genesis of the enlightenment subject in terms of "natural history," one is able to chart the historical discursive "origin" of conceptual thought; recognizing that, apart from their historical genesis, concepts also arise out of a desire for the "control of nature" (*DE,* 1; *ND,* 11, 269-70). As in psychoanalysis, through the recognition of such pathologies, one is able to gain a degree of mastery with respect to them, marking a utopian opportunity for thought to relate to the natural world in more substantial ways (Cook, 70, 79, 80-1; Sheratt, 50-69, 75). Yet, for Adorno, "maturity," or emancipation, will not entail some provincial community with nature, nor a wholesale rejection of mastery, but rather, a "memory of nature in the subject" (*DE,* 32), a "becoming conscious of the nature within ourselves" (Cook, *Nature,* 121). Thought must come to recognize its pathological desire for domination, admitting that every philosophy

will inevitably subjugate and striate the natural world (*ND,* 269, 22-27; Cook, *Nature,* 33).[68]

In this manner, a key insight of Adorno's for a potential critical ecological discourse lies in his investigation of the relation between the philosophical system—the encyclopedic-architectonic form of philosophy practiced by Kant and Hegel —and the subjugation of nature, or "particularity" (*ND,* 22-28; Zuidervaart, 84, 110; Vogel, 53-4): "the system is the belly turned mind, and rage is the mark of each and every Idealism" (*ND,* 23; cf. Nietzsche, *Will,* 314-5). Many have chastised the abstract formulations of Idealism for being amenable to totalitarianism (most notably, Popper, 229-82), but Adorno's uniqueness lies in the location of a "dominating character" immanent to the conceptual mechanism of philosophy itself: the schema of discursive conceptual cognition (inaugurated by Kant) is one based on the exclusion of particularity ("non-identity") in favor of the general level of the concept (or "identity"). Such a centering of philosophy around the concept is largely inherited by Hegel, who sought to elevate Kant's subjective transcendental exercise to the ontological level of conceptual "logic" (*SOL,* 25-28; Ng, 10-15).

A unique facet of Adorno's post-Idealism lies in his Hegelian insistence on the conceptual-discursive nature of cognition: one has no access to the material or natural world other than subjective categories. Despite his criticisms of the pathological nature of enlightenment cognition, Adorno is emphatic that "necessity compels philosophy to operate with concepts" (*ND,* 11-12, 5-7). Adorno's critical upshot for the thought of nature lies in his refusal to uphold any pure un-mediated realm of nature independent of history, in the Hegelian parlance, no "sense certainty" independent of the conceptual mediations of *Geist* (*PS,* 66)*.* Adorno's thought constantly resists the temptations of "authenticity" or "origin"; instead, one must always begin in a mediated fashion, in the middle, continually within the "circle of circles" (Hegel, *EL,* 39). In critically reflecting on the essentially conceptual nature of thought, philosophy does not dispense with the

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[68] As will be argued in Chapter 5, Schelling similarly fractures the epistemic subject: revealing it as a tensioned space of drives (or productive potencies), such that it is dethroned from its position of sovereignty. Further, in his middle work, Schelling's proto-psychoanalytic vision figures history as abortive and crisis laden—as acting out God's (natural) pathologies (Rajan, "The Abyss of the Past," Par, 26-9).

concept wholesale; instead it arrives at the recognition that "In truth, all concepts refer to non-conceptualities" (*ND,* 11); that is, the concept is grounded—via "determinate negation"—on that which it is not, or that which it differs from, within the broader constellation of objects and linguistic expressions (*ND,* 18-19, 52-3, 162-66).[69] Such an employment of the concept under erasure highlights the performative nature of "non-identity," an ephemeral realm beyond the concept that can be approached experimentally, in a manner akin to "semblance" in aesthetic experience: "In semblance, non-semblance is promised" (*ND,* 404-5).

Adorno's negative dialectic continually exposes the "identity-thinking" of conceptual rationality, to its phantasmatic other—somatic "non-identical" particularity (*ND,* 8)—forcing the concept to tarry with its negative relationship to the world. Adorno follows Hegel's meta-critique of philosophy as an exercise of "mere epistemology" *(PS,* 58-103), with "non-identity thinking," connoting a mode of conceptual thought that is aware of the limitations and proper scope of discursive cognition (Cook, *Nature,* 74). Thus, despite his critiques, Adorno remains committed to a defense of conceptual thought in tension with the sensuous and autogenetic realm of nature understood as a constellation of moments— "non-conceptuality, individuality, and particularity" (*ND,* 8)—left out by the determinate nature of the concept.

Adorno should be seen as one who opens philosophical discursive cognition to natural-historical particularity through an engagement with natural transience and negatively by way of the "second nature" of the aesthetic domain. Despite his critiques of Idealism, Adorno's corpus as a whole demonstrates an immanent "working through" of German Idealism refashioning its concepts so as to present possible "thought models," or "historical constellations," through which philosophy can relate to the natural world in a less oppressive manner. Broadly speaking, through practices of critical self-reflection (or "Critical Theory"), thought can become aware of its destructive urges and endeavor to act otherwise (*ND,* 1-5*;* 406-8; Zuidervaart, 163; Cook, *Nature,* 131- 132, 153-4).[70] Adorno

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[69] Such an understanding of language bears an evident affinity with Derrida's notion of language as "*Différance,*" see "Différance" (3-19).

[70] As Cook writes, "radical change presupposes a critical understanding of the tendencies and behaviors that now thwart effective political action," a task undertaken by self-reflexive "Critical Theory," which

critiques "subjectivist" systems of thought—such as positivism, subjective Idealism, and phenomenology—which commence with "constitutive subjectivity" (*ND,* xx), positing a primacy to the subject and its categories, thus unconsciously denying the dynamic and historical character of both the natural world and human thought (*ND,* xx; *Epistemology,* 3-31). However, Adorno's Schopenhauerian pessimism should lead to reservations as to the extent to which thought could comport itself other than in a controlling fashion, as Adorno seems to provide few points of hope, other than the mystical "immediacy" of mimesis, or the *deus ex machina* of the (modernist) aesthetic (Vogel, *Nature,* 69-71, 80-3, 95-8; Taubes, 70-6).[71]

Against such stereotypes, throughout this dissertation I argue that the aesthetic plays a crucial role in allowing philosophy to move beyond mere conceptuality, introducing the sensuous realm and other modes of (aesthetic) experience into thought, figuring the possibility of a more porous and sympathetic model of rationality (as I will argue in 2.3). For Adorno, a key aim of the aesthetic lies in its "redemption of illusion" (*AT,* 107; Zuidervaart, 178-216), that is, a fracturing of the concept by those provisional domains it supposedly surpassed (such as art, nature, or religion), redeeming a notion of surface, or (dialectical) immediacy by way of aesthetic experience. Throughout *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno extensively considers the relationship(s) between art, nature, and philosophy (61-78; Cook, *Nature,* 45-6, 60-1), a relationship which will be explored in more depth in Ch. 6. devoted to Hegel by way of Adorno's notion of "natural–beauty" (6.2.3.1). Adorno embraces nature's "non-existence," understanding its social construction as a "mediated placeholder of immediacy," and through such an essayistic embrace of mediated second nature, hopes to save a space, so as to allow nature to

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"plumbs our natural history, examining the trends and tendencies that now undermine effective practice" (*Nature,* 131- 132, 153-4). Cook further calls for "a new form of language" which would "reflect the longings of the oppressed and the plight of nature" (*Nature,* 88).

[71] J. Taubes contrasts the eschatological visions of Benjamin and Adorno. For Benjamin "The drawbridge comes from the other side. And when you get fetched or not, as Kafka describes it, is not up to you. One can take the elevators up to the high-rises of spirituality—it won't help...there is a *prius*, an a priori. Something has to happen from the other side; *then* we see, when our eyes are pierced open. Otherwise we see nothing... [Benjamin] maintains the Messiah and doesn't let it drift into neutrality," whereas "Adorno can't let go. He's an aesthete, after all. Music then has a soteriological role. Neither Benjamin not Barth could go for such naïve notions" (*Political Theology,* 76 cf. 70-5).

flourish: "Through total mediation…a new immediacy, a new humanity would arise" (*Prisms.* 250).

Adorno's (and Benjamin's) employment of "natural history" is "not concerned with natural history in the traditional, prescientific sense of a history of nature, nor with the history of nature where nature is the object of natural science" (Hullot-Kentor, 252). It is rather an allegorical vision of history subject to "nature, ruin and trauma" (Rajan, "Natural history," 187). As an image it does not culminate in some enlightenment vision of historical providence, nor in the straightforward self-organization of the great chain of being. Natural history stresses the ruined, contingent, incomplete, and accidental character of all intellectual constructions. Both Hegel and Schelling seemingly figure nature (and other domains such as art-aesthetics, history, and philosophy) pro-dialectically in terms of a "series of graduated stages" (*Stufenfolge*), presenting an evolutionary narrative of upward self-organization, as spheres evolve, becoming increasingly complex (Schelling, *FO*, 53-6; Rajan, "Evolution," 153, 162). However, it is far too common to caricature the absolute Idealism of Hegel and Schelling in such an evolutionary-teleological manner, a conception contravened by the fact that their work provides a plethora of contingent natural historical moments—or accidents—which "resist" such teleological narratives (Rajan, "Evolution," 153). In this dissertation, I favor such a natural historical, or mortuary, vision of Idealism which focuses on its diremptive failures, rather than its overarching logical systems.

Much remains to be said regarding Adorno's assertions of the "natural character" of historical processes (see "World Spirit and Natural History," *ND,* 300-58), a gesture which brings his work into constellation with the Freud of *Civilization and its Discontents,* whereby latent "nature" manifests in the pathological and destructive forces of history (55-6, 77-82, 105-112). In the lineage of ecological thought, it is Adorno's critique of "the natural," or the de-naturalizing of nature, that should be seen as particularly efficacious: "nature" is not some mythological-fateful substratum— "what has always been, what is fatefully arranged" (*NH,* 253)—but rather, a concept which has a historical genesis. Following Marx, for Adorno, "all reification is a forgetting" (*DE,* 191); that is, in capitalist-modernity historical social relations are "naturalized" as fetishes that mask their historical development, looming above the subject as a "second

nature" (*NH,* 261-2, 268-9). In this way, an essential task of critical social theory entails the construction of "changing historical constellations," which allow for interpretations of reality which estrange one from it, allowing one to grasp what is seemingly "natural" in its historical genesis (*AP*, 127- 128)*.* In general, such critiques of mythology are conducted within "second nature," that is, within the realm of convention, of socio-cultural "mythologies." What is needed is a further extension of this concept into the realm of "first nature": a decoding of the material-social forces latent in nature itself*,* along with an analysis of the discourses we employ to speak and act with respect to such a world. Put otherwise, one should read "first nature" as a cipher, as a sedimented site of material-historical trajectories.[72]

## 1.4   The Negative Dialectic: The Impossible Possibility of Philosophy
"Philosophy can always go astray, which is the sole reason it can go forward." Adorno, *ND,* 14.

Adorno describes the "negative dialectic" as an intellectual "laying of cards on the table," or a "methodological account of what I do in general" (*ND,* xix; *Lectures ND,* 5). In light of such proclamations one can read the completed text of *Negative Dialectics* (1966) as the crystallization of Adorno's critical-social epistemology, while his prolific output of texts and lectures (1960-6) sought to enact the method of the negative dialectic through its application to a diversity of domains. The fact that many of the central moments of *Negative Dialectics* are rehearsed or articulated elsewhere gives the text a mosaic and composite quality: it maintains the fragmentary and incomplete quality of "the essay" against the absolute closure of the philosophical system. Nancy has drawn attention to the "speculative" character of Hegel's "remarks" (*Zusätze*), which continually proliferate against Hegel's attempt to bind philosophy within the restricted economy of "the encyclopedia of the philosophical sciences" (*Speculative,* 7-19, 75-101; Hegel, *EO*, 51-55l).[73] Hegel's lectures—along with editions of his *Logic* and *Philosophy*

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[72] Two theorists who exemplify such a natural-historical reading of nature are W. Cronon, who exposes the mythology of "wilderness" as a scene of imperialist domination ("Wilderness," 7-28); and T. Ingold, who reads the supposedly natural "landscape" as a rebus to history and human temporality ("Landscape," 152-74).
[73] Occasioned by "the Remark that the *Science of Logic* devotes to the *Aufhebung*" (13), Nancy examines a subterranean "economy of remarks" (48) subtending Hegel's thought, such that each Hegelian text "gives

*of Nature*—are shot through with such remarks, such that the final unity of his system is troubled by way of countless possible detours.[74] *Negative Dialectics* embraces this "speculative quality" (*PS,* 22; Nancy, *Speculative,* 53-101) of philosophical cognition, employing the fragmentary form of the constellation such that the various moments differentially refract each other in singularity, while also (negatively) forming an aspect of a broader mosaic-network.

In light of Nancy's analysis, Adorno's "negative dialectic" should not be seen as an isolated text, but rather, as the animating method of Adorno's writing. Thus, in its articulation here, reference will be made to other texts and essays in order to elucidate its central tenets. Adorno's "anti-system" attempts "To use the strength of the subject to break through the fallacy of constitutive subjectivity" (*ND,* xx). That is, Adorno deconstructs the traditional enlightenment subject in an attempt to theorize the relationship between systematicity and experience anew. Negative dialectics deconstructs the polarities of "relativism and absolutism" (*Lectures ND,* 149) with respect to the philosophical system: it contravenes the absolutism of the absolute Idealist system-encyclopedia (that would attempt to subsume the entirety of reality by way of the concept), while it also moves against a relativist irrationalism that would dispense with the system all together. As has been argued throughout, Adorno's post-Idealism splinters and re-appropriates conventional Idealist "concepts and categories," while not dispensing with them entirely (*ND*, 134-211). Adorno plays on the self-fracturing quality of Idealism itself, favouring the "accident" (Hegel, *PS,* 18) or an Idealism without absolutes, as opposed to absolute systematic closure.

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rise to a multiplication of texts" (60). In this manner, though Hegel is often characterized as a thinker of subsumption and conceptual imperialism, Nancy demonstrates the complex negative network of deferral operating within the Hegelian encyclopedia, such that Hegel can be seen (equally) as a thinker of negativity and speculative proliferation. Describing the uniquely "speculative" character of Hegel's German language, Nancy rephrases a remark from Hegel (of the *Logic*), "German has many advantages over other modern languages; some of its words even possess the further peculiarity of having not only different but opposite meaning so that one cannot fail to recognize a speculative spirit of language in them" (*Speculative,* 61).

[74]Not all *Zusätze* were included by Hegel himself, as the published Encyclopedia (in Hegel's lifetime) did not include remarks. These were added (as adaptations of Hegel's lecture notes) to the collected editions of Hegel by his students Boumann (to the *Logic*) and Michelet (to the *Philosophy of Nature*), such that the texts have a hybrid and collaborative character.

In the first part of the published text ("Relation to Ontology: 1. The Ontological Need. 2. Being and Existence," *ND,* 61-133), Adorno forcefully rejects the "fundamental ontologies" of his contemporaries, while criticizing the more general movement of philosophy towards ontology. To follow Adorno's fractured Idealism, one cannot claim to grasp some fundamental substrate (or "Being") independent of the subject's categories: ontology (as espoused by Heidegger in particular) hypostasizes the subject's epistemological perspective as a knowledge of the *thing-in-itself* (*ND*, 69-72)*.* Such critiques are continued in Adorno's polemical text, *The Jargon of Authenticity* (1964), which, though published separately, was originally intended for inclusion within *ND*, and contains many relevant criticisms of ontology and the "jargon" of existentialist philosophy.[75] Adorno then goes on to articulate his own model of critical social philosophy ("Negative Dialectics. Concept and Categories," *ND*, 134-210), models he then places in dialogue with Kantian ethics, and Hegelian historical philosophy respectively ("Freedom: *On the Meta-Critique of Practical Reason," ND,* 211-99; "World Spirit and Natural History: *An Excursus on Natural History," ND,* 300-60).[76] The text ends with essayistic fragments reminiscent of *Minima Moralia,* which articulate the main motifs of Adorno's nebulous notion of "metaphysical experience" ("Meditations on Metaphysics," *ND*, 361-408).[77]

Despite its daunting and tome-like quality, the completed text of *Negative Dialektik* (1966) is a fragmentary and essayistic work in which the various sections are arranged in a tensioned mosaic. Likewise, the relationship between *ND* and the

[75] For more on the complex relationship between Adorno and Heidegger, see Macdonald and Ziarek (Ed.), *Adorno and Heidegger: Philosophical Questions* (2007).
[76] Within these sections in particular, Adorno undertakes a sustained critique of the theory-praxis relation, in specific relation to the Marxist primacy of practical-political engagement. (*ND,* 365-8; Zuidervaart, 48-76). Adorno moves against "eastern bloc" communism, instead developing an Idealist model in which philosophy criticizes itself, endeavoring to theorize the possibility of metaphysics after the failure of Marxist programs (*ND,* 405-8).
[77] In this way, the project of "negative dialectics" should be seen as encompassing not just Adorno's 1966 published work, but also, his entire circle of production from 1958-69, including texts such as *Aesthetic Theory* (1969), the *Jargon of Authenticity* (1964), *Prisms* (1962), *Critical Models* (1963/9), and *Hegel: Three Studies* (1963), along with the surrounding lectures, *Metaphysics* (1965), *Lectures on Negative Dialectics* (1965), *Introduction to Sociology* (1968), *Problems of Moral Philosophy*(1963), and *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*(1959). I further contend that the negative dialectic is also latent in Adorno's 1931-2 lectures, "On the Actuality of Philosophy" (1931) and "The Idea of Natural History" (1932), lectures which set the coordinates for his mature philosophy (see Buck-Morss, "Introduction," 119).

unfinished *Ästhetische Theorie* (1970)—or between philosophy and aesthetics more broadly—cannot be finally settled, and the two domains remain in productive conflict throughout Adorno's oeuvre. In the following sections, several of the central features of Adorno's negative dialectical model of thought will be articulated. Firstly (in 1.4.1), the aesthetic-linguistic "philosophical formalism" of negative dialectics will be described, whereby it will be argued that, via an engagement with form, Adorno is able to present a provisional rapprochement between philosophy and aesthetics (more about which will be said in Ch. 2). Following such a formal analysis, the epistemic armature of the negative dialectic will be presented as one that involves a deconstruction of the Idealist "subject-object" model of philosophical cognition (1.4.2).

### 1.4.1 The Form of Negative Dialectics: "The Essay as Form" (On Writing)
"Instead of reducing philosophy to categories, the task in a sense is to compose it." Adorno, *Lectures ND,* 150.

In what follows I will provide an interpretation of Adorno's 1958 "Essay as Form," in correspondence with Benjamin's early philosophy of language (up to the "Epistemo-Critical Prologue," of his 1925/8 *Trauerspiel*) and Lukács' "On the Nature and Form of the Essay" (1911). I argue that Adorno's "Essay as Form" is a manifesto for his essayistic "philosophical formalism," or the correct model for a post-Auschwitz philosophy. Adorno positions the essay (the form of his philosophy in general) against the "universal and enduring" claims of the Idealist architectonic—with its encyclopedic conquest of reality by way of rational thought. Against such absolute pretentions, the essay employs a cunning awareness of "luck and play" (*NL I: 4*), emphasizing the precarious and "finite character" of philosophical inquiry. As a historical entity, thought is at risk to the same forces it seeks to describe. To follow Benjamin—whom Adorno mentions as a quintessential "essayistic thinker" (*NL I:* 3)—philosophy must be erected upon the historical transience of "allegory," not the a-historical "symbol" (*OT,* 172, 188).[78] For Adorno, such a fragmentary and essayistic model of presentation—with an

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[78] Halmi (in *Genealogy of the Romantic Symbol* (2007)) glosses the enlightenment encyclopedia as desiring the form of the symbol, that is, as aiming for timeless unity over against historical genesis and contingency (27-33).

emphasis on the precarity of the subject, and the "transience" of historical entities—must take the place of the traditional Idealist philosophical system. However, such a model does not necessitate the wholesale abandonment of the philosophical architectonic in favour of some irrationalism, or some Heideggerian post-metaphysical "task of thinking" (see, Heidegger, "The End of Philosophy," 427-49). As Adorno is careful to note, "The essay is both more open and more closed than traditional thought would like" (*NL I:*17), it has a responsibility, "not only to authorities and committees; but the object itself" (*NL I:* 6). Philosophy, for Adorno, should proceed immanently from the object, thus should not be judged based on systematic coherence, but rather, on the extent to which it is able to "unleash the power of the text [or object]" (*NL I:* 4). In this way, philosophy should not be evaluated based on its architectonic completeness, or logical validity, but rather, to the extent that it is able to provoke "reflection" with respect to its object, while eliciting further subjective "shudders."

Because of its inability to appeal to conventional modes of systematic authority, philosophy is condemned to "work emphatically at the form of its presentation" (*NL I:*18): thought must experiment with alternative models of intellectual grounding while reflecting on its existence *within* language, conceding that thought takes place "in language and not through language" (Benjamin, *SW 1*: 63). Such a linguistic-formal turn places a new emphasis upon language as a transcendental condition for thought, which must constantly consider the importance of "presentation" [*Darstellung*] in the practice of thought, as opposed to simply deferring to the authority of the philosophical system or deductive logic. Adorno follows Benjamin's "Epistemo-Critical" linguistic method, which is described in his *Trauerspiel*: "If philosophy is to preserve the law of its form not as a mediating guide to knowledge but as a presentation (*Darstellung*) of truth, then it is necessary to emphasize the practice of this form—not, however, its anticipation within the system" (*OT,* 2; *GS I:* 203).

Along with Benjamin's theory of language (which will be further discussed in 3.4), Lukács' early writings serve as an important reference point in the development of Adorno's philosophical formalism, or model of philosophy as essay. In "On the Nature and Form of the Essay," which opens *The Soul and Form* (1911), Lukács seeks to demarcate the fundamental "form" of the essay: "The essay has a form which separates it,

with the rigor of law, from all other art forms" ("Essay," 2). For Lukács, the essay entails a necessarily Platonic abstraction from the world of poetry, which knows no questions, only the immanence of "life." Poetry, as the "criticism of life," experiences an imagistic immediacy with respect to things, while "critics and Platonist[s]…reach out most passionately for what lies behind the image"; violently disturbing this poetic immediacy, the essay gets "at significance" (*Ibid,* 6). Through the discovery of "significance," the critic is able to arrange art and life within a broader progression of forms: "were one to compare the forms of literature with sunlight refracted in a prism, the writing of essays would be the ultraviolet rays" (Lukács, "Essay," 7). In this movement of abstraction, the critic ironically plays at the dialectic of "being accidental and being necessary" (*Ibid.,* 15-18): in turning away from life as it is "lived" and immersing themselves in downcast and insignificant details, the critic attempts to speak of "life" through indirect and negative means. Whereas poetry speaks of "life (and art)" the essay can only model "art (and life)" retroactively after the fact—after the conclusion of the day's events (Lukács, "Essay," 10; Hegel, *Right,* 23).

One can see in Lukács' model the same nostalgia for a lost "golden age"—in which existential "homelessness" would be alleviated—that pervades much of his early work (see, *Novel,* 29-39). Though Lukács upholds the "fragmentariness [of the essay] against the petty completeness of scientific explanation" ("Essay," 17), he longs for the great aesthetes of modern life who would reconcile soul and form, awakening "the charnel house of dead interiorities" (*Novel,* 24). For Lukács the nostalgic, the mediation of modern (capitalist) life is not something to be celebrated, but rather, mourned, as Lukács reveals his final affinity with an Idealist-Platonism: "life, too, has its golden ages and its lost paradises" ("Essay, 12").[79] Adorno rejects Lukács' quest to rigidly define the essay as a Platonism vis-à-vis life; for Adorno, no such ideal forms exist, only fragmentary natural-historical constructions. According to Adorno, the writer of the essay

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[79] Adorno criticizes Lukács' salvific narratives (via Benjamin) in his "Idea of Natural History," decrying that Lukács "can only think of this charnel house in terms of a theological resurrection, in an eschatological context," and further, "[Lukácian] second nature could only be brought back to life, if ever, by a metaphysical act of reawakening the spiritual element that created or maintained it in its earlier or ideal existence, but could never be experienced by another interiority" (*NH,* 252).

must learn to be at home in "second nature" and mediation—to be a flâneur in "modern life"—not, like Lukács, to long for its secret abolition, upholding a secret faith in the return of the "golden age."

The upshot of Adorno's (and Benjamin's) philosophical formalism[80] lies in the expanded notion of philosophical grounding it provides, allowing a divergent array of particular "micrological" experiences to enter into discussion with philosophy, challenging its categories in experimental directions. As Adorno writes, the essay "allows for the consciousness of non-identity," rebelling against the doctrine "that what is transient, and ephemeral is un-worthy of philosophy" (*NL I:* 9-10).[81] Instead, the essay wants "to use concepts to pry open the aspects of its object that cannot be accommodated by concepts" (*NL I:* 23). With this opening of thought towards transience, the essay takes on a natural-historical character, embracing the precarious experimental nature of philosophical constructions. Instead of the enlightenment domination of nature and "non-identity" with its determinate categories, philosophy holds a historical mirror up to the ur-transience of nature. As Adorno writes, "Spellbound by what is fixed and agreed to be derived, the essay honours nature, by confirming that it exists no longer for people" (*NL I:* 19). The essay turns its gaze towards the downcast, the derived, the "accident" (Hegel, *PS,* 18), that which is historical, particular, and transient, moments discarded by the traditional philosophical architectonic with its quests for eternal ideas and harmonious systems (*ND,* 8-9). That is, philosophy attempts (following art) the "redemption of illusion" (*AT,* 107; Zuidervaart, 178-213): it attempts to redeem the particular "non-identical" moment beyond the reach of the concept, though immanently, from within natural-historical forms. As with aesthetics, the essay immerses itself in the mediation of "second nature" so as to catch a distorted glimpse of "first nature" (Paddison, 108). Such

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[80] Philosophical formalism should not be taken in the literary critical sense, but rather, as a model of philosophy which commences with an analysis of language, or form, as key analyses by Benjamin and Adorno do. See further, Robinson, *Adorno on Form* (1-11, 67-69, 133-5).

[81] The idea of a philosophy of "the downcast," or the "dregs of reality," is described further in Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*, where he writes: "The matters of true philosophical interest… are non- conceptuality, individuality, and particularly—things which ever since Plato used to be dismissed as transitory and insignificant" (*ND,* 8). Such a model is highly indebted to Benjamin's "micrological gaze" (Adorno, *Prisms,* 229, 240). Nietzsche also chastised previous systems of thought from the perspective of abjection, "Philosophers are prejudiced against appearance, change, pain, death, the corporeal, the senses, fate and bondage, the aimless" (*Will,* 220). See further, Buck Morss, *Origin* (74-6).

a redemption of nature is not undertaken by incorporating such "non-identical" moments into the concept, but rather, through the recognition of thought's inevitable inadequacy in the face of reality, a "shudder" of self-renunciation, respecting the fact that "objects do not go into their concepts without leaving some remainder" (*ND,* 5).[82] Through such gestures of self-fracturing, or negation, philosophy is able to encounter alternative logics beyond the scope of the concept, the most notable of which is "mimesis," as Adorno writes:

> As opposed to the total domination of method, it [philosophy] contains the element of play as a corrective that the traditional conception of it as a science would like to expunge. It is the most serious thing of all, but is not as serious as all that. …To represent the thing it has repressed, namely mimesis, the concept has no alternative but to incorporate some of it into its own behaviour." (*Lectures ND,* 187)[83]

The formal logic of "the constellation"—which arranges concepts in expressive mosaics—allows for a new form of philosophical grounding which supports Adorno's expanded sense of philosophy. For Benjamin, through a careful attention to language (in practices of poetics and translation), philosophy can attune an attentiveness to the expressive and mimetic dimensions of language (as I will argue in 3.4.3). By arranging concepts in constellation, philosophy is able to relate to the world in an expressive and non-reductive manner, while not wholly dispensing the concept. Describing his immanent conceptual logic, in which concepts arranged in "a mosaic" kaleidoscopically illuminate each other, Adorno will write:

> The alternative would be to assemble concepts in such a way that their constellation might shed light on the non-conceptual…these concepts would not be fixed…in isolation from the objects, but thrown in with them, abandoning the delusion that concepts that had been created for themselves also existed intrinsically in themselves…This means that theory

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[82] For Adorno, it is the method of dialectics that can best lead to this confrontation of philosophy with alterity: "Dialectics represents the attempt to incorporate into philosophy whatever is heterogeneous, philosophy's other we might call it." (*Lectures ND,* 57).

[83] Nathan Ross (in his *Aesthetic Experience*) has noted the extent to which Adorno is indebted to Schiller's notions of "semblance and play" (31-64, 193-233), that is, through a playful encounter with the world as "it seems" (semblance) one is able to encounter the world according to different logics other than discursive cognition. Alluding to such a possibility in his lectures on metaphysics, Adorno will write: "One must, as it were, include common sense and human triviality in metaphysical meaning; one must incorporate it in speculation as the principle which ensures that the world merely is and not otherwise, if the depth of speculation is not to be false, that is, a depth with confers an *illusory* meaning" (*Metaphysics*, 114). For more on the relationship between Adorno's work and Schillerian modes of aesthetic experience see, Ross (46-47, 55-58, 174, 236-7).

would cease to be a matter of subsumption; it would instead define the relation of the different conceptual elements among themselves (*Lectures ND,* 192).[84]

Such gestures represent Adorno's attempt to formulate a new logic of the concept, one not based on "subsumption," or the seizure of the object [*Begriff—greifen*], but rather, one which is open to the object in its particularity, and hence is able to "define the relation of different conceptual elements among themselves." Adorno, following Benjamin, attempts to re-awaken an expressive understanding of language (which I will articulate in 3.4), whereby alternative logics, such as mimesis and semblance are allowed a place in philosophy (*ND,* 18-19, 52-3, 162-66). Throughout these considerations "mimesis" will be broadly understood as a constellation of expressive and non-discursive logics left out of the traditional philosophical concept (as will be elaborated in 3.4.3). Adorno's caustic modernist prose should be seen as an attempt to open philosophy in such mimetic directions, recovering an "aesthetic dignity of words": "In order to posit a new truth, there remains... no hope other than to place the words in a new configuration, which would itself yield such a new truth" (Adorno, "Theses on Language", 38).[85]

In these senses, Adorno's considerations related to the formal elements of philosophy represent a provisional rapprochement between philosophy and aesthetics, given that philosophy is compelled to reflect upon its own formal conditions, that is, its existence within language and mediation. More will be said regarding the critical power of aesthetics in the following chapter (2.3) of these considerations.  Following Benjamin, the task of a coming philosophy entails the recognition of language as a transcendental condition of philosophy (3.4); for Adorno, the essay form most adequately engages with this mediated situation of thought.

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[84] Differentiating the constellation (or "essay") from the conventional philosophical architectonic, Adorno writes: "[In the architectonic] all...concepts are to be presented in such a way that they support one another, that each becomes articulated through its configuration with others. In the essay discrete elements set off against each other come together to form a readable context; the essay erects no scaffolding and no structure. But the elements crystalize as a configuration through their motion. The constellation is a force field, just as every intellectual structure is necessarily transformed under the essay's gaze" (*NL I:*13).

[85] Further describing the disenchanted linguistic context which the philosopher of language confronts (and the possibility of "freedom" via linguistic allegorical reconfiguration), Adorno writes: "Today the philosopher confronts disintegrated language. The ruins of words are his material, to which history binds him; his freedom is solely the possibility of their configuration according to the force of truth in them. He is as little permitted to think the word as pre-given as to invert a word" ("Theses," 37). For more on the linguistic element of Adorno's thought, see Gandesha, "Aesthetic Dignity" (78-102).

### 1.4.2 Negative Dialectics and Epistemology: On the Subject and Object

"Consciousness itself is the *absolute dialectical unrest,* this medley of sensuous and intellectual representations whose differences coincide, and whose identity is equally again dissolved, for it is itself determinateness as contrasted with the non-identical. But it is just in this process that this consciousness, instead of being self-identical, is in fact nothing but a purely causal, confused medley, the dizziness of a perpetually self-engendered disorder." Hegel, *PS,* 124.

In this section, Adorno's "subject-object" model of cognition will be elaborated via an examination of his interventions upon the critical Kantian critical program (in his lecture course, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason,* 1959), alongside a reading of his 1963 essay "On the Subject and Object." The development of a fractured negative dialectical "subject-object" model of consciousness is one of the key aims of the negative dialectic, and again reveals the extent to which Adorno is committed to upholding moments of the Kantian and Hegelian program in productive tension, refashioning epistemic models from the work of each. Adorno's thinking apropos of the disaster elaborates a broad movement of philosophy towards the "primacy of the object" [*Vorrang des Objeckts*]: philosophy must move away from the "fallacy of constitutive subjectivity," which posits that the subject and its categories come first (as Kant does), towards the object, recognizing the prior rank of something other than oneself and one's conceptual givens (*ND,* 183-188 // 182-7, xx). In the paradoxical language of the opening of *Negative Dialectics,* philosophy must use a minimal "strength of the subject" to move "beyond the subject" (*ND,* xx). In Kantian terms, this entails coming to recognize logics other than those provided by the transcendental deduction, such as those inherent in nature itself, alongside other reflective encounters with alterity. However, for Adorno, such criticisms should not discount the radicalism of Kant's "Copernican turn"—the recognition that the mind does not conform to objects, but rather "the object" is itself a construction of the subject's categories— which is why Adorno is careful to specify his intervention as an "axial shift" (*ND,* xx) of the Copernican turn, and not a wholesale abandonment.[86] Any student of epistemology,

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[86] Describing his own reorientation of metaphysics in relation to Copernicus' astronomical insights, Kant writes: "Hence let us once try whether we do not get farther with the problems of metaphysics by assuming that objects must conform to our cognition, which would agree better with the request of a possibility of an *a priori* cognition of them, which is to establish something about objects before they are given to us. This would be just like the first thoughts of Copernicus, who, when he did not make good progress in the explanation of the celestial motions if he assumed that the entire celestial host revolves around the observer, tried to see if he might not have greater success if he made the observer revolve and left the stars at rest" (*CPR,* 110).

specifically in its German instantiations, should maintain a minimal regard for the Idealist position: how can one have access to "the object" (or the world in general) other than through the categories of the subject?[87] Adorno's position is not to deny the subject and its categories a central role in cognition, but rather, to emphasize the dynamic and reciprocal character of the "subject-object" model of cognition: the subject and its categories do not wholly encompass the object. Further, the subject must open itself to transformative metaphysical experiences which come by way of the object. To follow Hegel, "consciousness itself is the absolute dialectical unrest" (Hegel, *PS,* 124), that is, it is the experience of having one's categories and suppositions wrecked by the realities of the world, or the absolute "conflict" between the empirical and transcendental domains. Adorno remains an Idealist—though a materially and critically inflected one— and his work should be seen as providing an Idealist-modernist rebuttal to those who would summarily dismiss such a tradition.

Despite Adorno's well documented allegiance to the Hegelian program, in the domain of epistemology he also remains an eminent Kantian, as Adorno positions the finitude of the Kantian subject in tension with Hegel's absolute Idealism, criticizing both by way of each other. For Adorno (particularly in his 1959 lecture course, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*), Kant marks a watershed moment in the history of philosophy as one who attempted to "salvage" something of classical metaphysics from the fires of skepticism and empiricism. As such, Kant remains important as one who develops a rigorously critical, though anti-foundational (in the sense of an ontology), system of thought. It is within Kant's work that Adorno—along with Horkheimer (*Philosophy & Social Science,* 19-20)—dates the first emergence of the critical-enlightenment subject of the Western tradition: the enlightened subject who was able to "use [its] own understanding" exercising one's autonomous reasoning power in a public manner (Kant,

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[87] Here I mean to put pressure on the charge of "correlationsim" with which Meillassoux criticizes much of German Idealism. For Meillassoux, "correlationism" refers to "the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other' (*Finitude*, 5). According to Meillassoux, deep temporal events and ontological crises of extinction put existential strain on the subject-object relation. Adorno's work in particular, though also that of Hegel and Schelling, shows the dynamic manners in which this subject-object relation can be experimentally recast so as to respond to Meillassoux's objections.

"Enlightenment," 54). Further, Kant's work, specifically during the critical period, can be read as an epistemology of finitude or a doctrine of epistemic modesty, which preserves the "noble feature of the thing-in-itself" (*Kant,* 129), recognizing the fundamental "block" (*Kant*, 170-79), or "non-identity," at the heart of cognition (*ND,* 5). For Adorno, this recognition of "something more," beyond the concepts and categories of the subject presents cognition with a minimal negative utopic moment—through the recognition of its own limitations, the subject is able to step back, allowing for other forms of flourishing (Adorno & Bloch, 12-13). The recovery of such a minimal notion of transcendence also occurs in Adorno's discussion of the sublime (via the dialectical image "natural-beauty") which will be explore in more depth in 6.2.3.1 of these considerations.

Adorno does not simply cast aside Kant in favour of Hegel, but rather, works to examine and problematize the constitutive antinomies of the Kantian architectonic, such as those between nature and freedom and the distinction between empirical and transcendental.[88] In the end, Adorno felt the Kantian attempt to grasp all that can be known through a finite transcendental table of categories was a tragically noble, though ultimately failed, endeavour. As Adorno states:

> With this the *Critique of Pure Reason* represents the first great attempt in modern times—or perhaps we should say the first and also the last great attempt, and one doomed to failure—to master through mere concepts all that cannot be mastered by concepts. And what the concepts express is that by establishing "identity" they are simultaneously compelled to acknowledge the fact of "non-identity." (*Kant,* 234)

As such, Kant's various distinctions, positions, questions, and above all, his terminology will play an important role in the formulation of Adorno's own expanded notion of

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[88] Adorno describes the starting point of his own "dialectical conception of philosophy" as a problematizing of the relationship between the empirical and the transcendental (or the concept): "If there is a point at which the transition to a dialectical conception of philosophy is compelling, this would seem to me the place to start. There is no empirical self without the concept, with those elements not reducible to mere *existence* and objectivity" (*Lectures ND,* 148). As Adorno stresses throughout his oeuvre, the subject must be seen as containing within it both social and spontaneous elements, neither of which can fully reduce or ontologize the subject. In this way, the Adornian self, to follow Foucault, should be seen as a "empirico-transcendental doublet" (*Order,* 322). Elsewhere in *Negative Dialectics,* Adorno associates metaphysical experience with a Kantian notion of freedom, a subject which acts "as-if" it is free from natural compulsion: "Rather the possibility of metaphysical experience is akin to the possibility of freedom, and it takes an unfolded subject, one that has torn the bonds as salutary, to be capable of freedom" (*ND,* 397).

experience. Adorno, Benjamin, Schelling and Hegel all recognize this duality in the Kantian program, criticizing his limitations, while maintaining a reverence for his transcendental approach to philosophy, meta-critically harnessing the Kantian program so as to interrogate philosophy in relation to marginal domains such as aesthetics and nature.

Fundamentally, Adorno opposes the comprehensive nature of the Kantian architectonic—with its claim that it could account for "all possible experience"—and he emphatically asserts that the whole idea that a "finite system of categories [could] provide us with a pure system of knowledge" must be "scotched" (*Lectures ND,* 80-81). Yet such a "scotching" does not necessitate the wholesale abandonment of the transcendental, or other Kantian categories and ideas, but rather, a radical revision of the relationship between transcendental and empirical, opening philosophy to an infinity of "possible objects" through the creation of speculative constellations of ideas.[89] Instead of trying to grasp infinite ideas, or to explain the infinite by way of finite table of categories, philosophy should open itself to an infinite mosaic of "possible objects." For Adorno, this amounts to an existential secularization of metaphysics, a critical attempt to force an encounter of philosophy with its own existential precarity, compelling philosophy to recognize the finite nature of its categories: "If philosophy should possess anything at all it should be finite, not infinite" (*Lectures ND,* 80). Thought should move away from attempts to grasp the infinite by way of the subject (or its transcendental categories), striving instead to open itself to the infinite diversity of possible objects. As Adorno writes, "philosophy should seek its contents in the unlimited diversity of objects" (*Lectures ND,* 81), not as Kant does, in the formal analyses of the categories of the subject. In such ways, Adorno aims at an opening and continual epigenesis of Kant's transcendental method (Adorno, *Kant,* 210).

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[89]Asserting the continued importance of transcendental philosophy, Adorno writes: "What I mean to ask is what is the *substantial meaning* that we are left with in Kant? The answer lies in a revision of the concept of the transcendental" (*Kant,* 210). Alluding to the importance of a changed concept of infinity in his own reflections, Adorno will write: "The meta-critical turn against a first philosophy that I am trying to explain to you from a number of angles is the turn against a finite philosophy that sounds off about the infinite and simultaneously is unable to appreciate the infinity that constantly eludes it" (*Lectures ND,* 83). As I will argue in the next chapter, Benjamin attempts a similar opening and expansion of the Kantian transcendental (see *SW 1*: 100-10).

Adorno is also highly critical (in a Hegelian manner) of the subterranean metaphysical valences of the Kantian project, those moments in which Kant's "salvage operation" "turned into a metaphysics…a metaphysics that, by turning towards the subject, seeks to salvage transcendence by concealing its existence at the heart of subjectivity" (*Kant,* 222). Unconsciously for Kant, where God and transcendence once were, "reason" now is. In moments such as this, Adorno sees Kant in line with the tradition of metaphysics that sought to subsume empirical-material particularity by way of a-historical categories.[90] Further, following similar critiques leveled by Benjamin, Adorno sees Kantian thought as annihilating the diverse domain of "experience," as philosophy becomes an abstracted "analysis of form" in which the content (or experience) is degraded as "something accidental and contingent, something changeable" (*Kant,* 44; cf. Benjamin, *SW 1:* 100-10). Exemplary of this is Kant's "A Version" of the "Transcendental Deduction" in which the particular "object" of experience is present only under erasure, as a mere "Object=x," which contributes nothing to consciousness (*CPR,* 230-243). For Adorno, Kant's denial of experience continues in the long lineage of epistemic for-censorship, or "identity-thinking," which favours sameness over difference, or the oneness of the concept over the multiplicity of sensuous existence. Adorno maintains the epistemic finitude of Kant, though within a broader theoretical general economy, which contests the problematic elements of the Kantian program by presenting Kant along with his disregarded phantasms.

Adorno's philosophical interventions necessitate a broader reconfiguration of the relationship between the "transcendental" and the "empirical," or what Adorno terms the "*constituens* and *constitutum"* of thought (*Kant,* 138-60). Adorno attempts to historicize the transcendental: opening the constitutive categories of thought by way of experience (*Kant,* 201). In fact, following Kant, the transcendental subject cannot be conceived without the empirical realm of consciousness (provided by psychology), and Adorno's thought attempts to trouble this distinction in unique ways (without collapsing it):

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[90] Describing the latent metaphysical elements of the Kantian program, Adorno will write: "That knowledge is *one* and the fact that this one has primacy over the many may be said to be the metaphysical premise of Kantian philosophy" (*Kant,* 196).

examining the moments when empirical or historical occurrences should call for a revision and opening of transcendental categories.

The unique contribution of Adorno's thought lies in its ability to maintain conventional (Idealist) philosophical categories, while opening them towards alterity and the object. Adorno simultaneously recognizes that such a turn towards "the object" does not necessitate the wholesale abandonment of "the subject," but rather, a fracturing or "shudder" of its constitutive stability. Here Adorno differs from Benjamin, who constantly advocates an allegorical immersion in the object, and consequently enacts the total evacuation of the subject as a unique aura, becoming a "post-humanist" avant-garde thinker. In his eulogy of Benjamin ("Portrait of Walter Benjamin"), Adorno will assert that Benjamin "conceived the downfall of the subject and the salvation of man as entwined" (230)*. As Adorno asserts, in contrast to Benjamin, in his essay, "On Subject and Object," "The separation of subject and object is both real and semblance" (*CM,* 246), and thus must be regulatively maintained. For Adorno, one must simultaneously move against the myth of a pure givenness: that some pure (human) nature exists independent of historical genesis, while concurrently rejecting the reality of a pure transcendental realm of concepts existing independent of natural-historical proclivities. According to Adorno, what is essential is the maintenance of a constant tension, or "non-identity," between the two realms. In this sense, critical philosophy's "attitude towards systems" (*ND,* 20-22) does not strive for the wholesale abandonment of traditional models of philosophical grounding, but rather, a "negation of the systematic impulse of philosophy" (*NL 1*: 18): a movement back towards the critical (enlightenment) subject of thought, though one endowed with a new constitutive precarity.[91] That is, a subject that is met with the shock or "shudder" that it is not wholly master over nature or "the object."

Adorno critically reminds theory of the role played by subjective categories in the maintenance of existing (political) reality. Following Lukács, Adorno argues that the "Critique of society is critique of knowledge and vice versa" (*CM,* 250), and further, "The subject's reflection upon its own formalism is reflection upon society" (*CM,* 247).

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[91]In his *Lectures on Negative Dialectics,* Adorno describes the migration of the critical power of the philosophical system to the essayistic wit of the individual: "The power of the system must be capable of being transformed into the criticism of the individual" (34).

For the early Lukács, the world appears as a "reified" "second nature" due to the static and a-historical "antinomies of bourgeois thought" (*Consciousness*, 110-49; *Novel*, 64-5). According to Lukács, this hex of capitalist social relations can only be broken through the dialectical messianic praxis of the proletariat, which engages in "de-reification" through political action (*Consciousness,* 205). However, for Adorno, under later forms of capitalism, the proletariat no longer exists as a localizable entity, hence such a critical de-reification must be undertaken theoretically via self-reflexive "Critical Theory." One must reflect upon oneself (psychoanalytically), recognizing the social determinants of one's subjectivity, along with the fact that enlightenment rationality has positioned the subject as an "armoured animal" against nature (*CM,* 252). For Adorno, "the subject" must be seen in a dual sense: primarily as a site of domination, yet also as containing within itself the capacity for self-reflection, or critique, through which it is able to develop new relationships with alterity. Describing such a dual capacity, Adorno will write, the "Subject in its self-positing is semblance and at the same time something historically exceedingly real. It contains the potential for the sublation of its own domination" (*CM,* 256).[92] It is such a manner that in *ND* Adorno describes his thought as utilizing the "strength of the subject" to move against the oppressive nature of "constitutive subjectivity," employing a minimal subjective agency against subjectivity, critiquing the ideological components of oneself (*ND,* xx). In light of Adorno's considerations, it is essential that philosophy be (re)thought formally, such that it become more porous and inclusive with respect to aesthetics and other counter-scientific, or marginal domains. As has been argued throughout this chapter, such a critical opening

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[92] In a Nietzschean manner, the subject must come to terms with its "dominating character" in relation to natural particularity and engage in willful acts of self-renunciation and self-critique. Reason must come to terms with its desire to dominate its mythological other, along with its dialectical entwinement in such a relation. As Horkheimer writes (echoing closely Adorno's sentiments) in the conclusion of his *Eclipse of Reason* (1947)*:* "The disease is that reason was born from man's urge to dominate nature, and the 'recovery' depends on insight into the nature of the original disease, not on a cure for the latest symptoms" (119). Further glossing this dialectic of enlightenment, "Now that science has helped us to overcome the awe of the unknown in nature, we are the slaves of social pressures of our own making. When called upon to act independently, we cry for patterns, systems, and authorities. If by enlightenment and intellectual progress we mean the freeing of men from superstition and belief in evil forces, in demons and fairies, in blind fate—in short, the emancipation from fear—then denunciation of what is currently called reason is the greatest service reason can render" (126).

will allow for encounters with a broader array of "experiences," which in turn will allow philosophy to develop more apt models of judgment and thought.

## 2  *Adorno and the Actuality of Philosophy: Inaugurating a New Conflict of the Faculties*

"This conflict cannot end, and it is the philosophy faculty that must always be prepared to keep it going."
Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties,* 55.

### 2.1  The Conflicts of the Faculties: Disciplinarity in Kant, Schelling, and Hegel

"The modern world is in general a world of antitheses, whereas in antiquity, except for individual stirrings, the finite and the infinite were united under a common veil. The spirit of the modern era tore this veil and showed the one in absolute opposition to the other." Schelling, *On University Studies*, 67.

Adorno's desire to renew philosophy in relation to crisis positions him as a thinker of the university: one who develops a theory of negative mediation between the various faculties of the university, provoking an interdisciplinary conflict within the organization of knowledge. The contours of this theory of negative mediation should be located within Adorno's larger post-Idealist intervention in the tradition, which seeks to experimentally work through German Idealism, extending while criticizing both the "absolute Idealism" of the Hegelian program, along with the "subjective Idealism" of the Kantian project. Adorno's post-Idealist specificity lies in this desire to combine a modified Hegelian encyclopedic perspective with a fractured Kantian understanding of the philosophical subject, following Bloch to "let Kant burn through Hegel" (*Spirit,* 187). This section explores Adorno's "conflict of the faculties" in relation to Kant's, Hegel's and Schelling's theses on the organization of knowledge, exploring the ways these thinkers (de) territorialize relationships between the various faculties of the mind and university.[93] Adorno installs a "conflict" at the heart of knowledge, whereby the various faculties are (un) bound in speculative directions, and disciplines such as aesthetics, philosophy, psychoanalysis, and sociology are placed in an interdisciplinary dialogue. By bringing the faculties of knowledge into conversation in a negative dialectic, Adorno motivates an immanent understanding of Idealism "without absolutes": that is, a self-fracturing or reflexively critical understanding of German Idealism's central tenets (Rajan, "Introduction," 2). Adorno's critical (inter) disciplinarity continues a disciplinary questioning (or meta-critique) already taking place within German Idealism, an

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[93] Though references to Schelling are sparse in Adorno's corpus (see *ND,* 15 61, 74-77,155, 174, 202; *AT,* 61,72, 77, 130 344), thematically, the two thinkers are extremely close; and as I will argue in Ch. 5 on Schelling, both thinkers elaborate a negative dialectical understanding of philosophy.

intellectual movement utilized by Adorno as a speculative site through which to inquire into philosophy's "actuality" (Hegel, *PS,* 27; Adorno, *AP,* 120-1).

Post-Kantian German Idealism is committed to a conception of absolute knowledge thought in terms of both its "real" and "ideal" moments, articulating notions of "reason," along with related concepts such as "freedom," "dialectic," "logic" and "system," in both a subjective and objective sense. Absolute Idealism sees rational processes not just exhibited in the categories of the mind (as Kant does), but also manifested in domains such as nature, politics, and history. Readings glosses the basic achievement of post-Kantian Idealism as "hav[ing] articulated and instituted an analysis of knowledge and its social function" (62); that is, Idealism explores the ideas of reason as they are worked out in domains such as politics, the arts and sciences, along with the ontological domain relating to the structure of reality itself. Readings further argues that the unique and lasting contribution of Idealism lies in its "Mak[ing] the university into the decisive instance of intellectual activity" as the institution which carries forward the "life" of reason: both in a systematic manner in terms of *Wissenschaft* (the domain of "research"), and in terms of the process of its formation (or "*Bildung*")*,* which is enacted through teaching (55). One sees such a tension, between the system and the processes of its acting out, or between genesis and structure, through much of Idealist thought, most notably, as I will argue, in the work of Hegel and Schelling (Ch. 5 & 6.). In this way, the thinking of the German Idealists specifically with respect to the university, but more broadly as well, is not simply "statist" or "metaphysical," but is in fact fraught with tensions and irreconcilable differences, and as such, can be problematized in speculative and interdisciplinary directions.

As will be argued throughout this project, Kant should be seen in a doubled sense: in one sense, territorializing philosophy as a restricted system of reason, while in another, providing means to deterritorialize and problematize his own divisions. To follow Derrida, Kant is "a hinge" that simultaneously "opens" while "closing off," one "body of thought to another."[94] In one sense, Kant participates in the "subjective Idealist" policing,

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[94] The notion of "the hinge" (*brisure*) first occurs in relation to Derrida's discussion of "the trace" (in *Grammatology,* 65-73), connoting those moments of *différance* which demonstrate that "writing can never be thought under the category of the subject" (*Grammatology,* 68-9). This gap conditions the possibility of

or marking off, of philosophy for the possibility of "practical reason" (or ethics); in another sense, Kant can be seen as a "hinge" to later Idealist-Romanticism, speculatively opening the possibility of new philosophical relations. As will be argued throughout this project, Adorno, Benjamin, Schelling and Hegel all locate such a duality in the Kantian program, employing particular moments of Kant to move past his bureaucratic intellectual division of labour.  In what follows, I will briefly sketch the Kantian restricted economy of philosophy, while exploring the ways in which such an economy can be opened and problematized.

Deleuze has described Kant's philosophy as being constituted by differing "relationships between the faculties" (of knowledge, desire, and judgment—corresponding to the three critiques), which can be speculatively de-territorialized in avant-garde directions (*Kant,* 10, 68). This analogy can also be extended to the relation among actual university faculties and disciplines, demonstrating a complex conflict between "reason" (or philosophy) and its employment in the traditional faculties of knowledge, law, medicine, and theology (*Conflict,* 25-8, 31-45), with a hope that such a reified understanding of the university can be likewise unbounded in interdisciplinary directions.  For Kant, in the *Conflict of the Faculties* (1798) the "conflict" in question evokes a parallelism between the "faculties" of the mind and the distribution of the university, charting a "division of labour" (*Conflict,* 23) between the various faculties of the university along with the faculties of knowledge (reason, understanding, imagination, judgment). *Prima facie,* Kant's policing of the diverse faculties of knowledge in the critical project also extends to the organization of knowledge more broadly, such that the university comes to be organized according to an "intellectual Taylorism," or "academic industry" in which each faculty, or discipline, plays a specific role which cannot be transgressed (Adorno, *DE,* 201-2; *CM,* 10). The critical project is steeped in a "legalism" which seeks to erect "reason" as judge, jury, and executioner, while determining the

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deconstruction (*Grammatology,* 72). Rajan draws attention to Derrida's later retranslation of the term in relation to Foucault and psychoanalysis ("The Hinge—Today," *Resistances,* 78-84), in relation to "intellectual history," as a means to describe the "Opening and closing off of one body of thought by another" (*Deconstruction,* 20-1). In Kant's case, one might consider those moments in which he, in trying to define (or "close off") philosophy in a restricted economy, unwittingly allows for (or "opens") the possibility of the later speculative invasions of German Idealism.

"legal and illegal" relationships between the faculties of the mind along with those of the university (*Conflict,* 47-61). As Kant writes, "This conflict cannot and should not be settled by an amicable accommodation, but calls for a verdict, that is, the decisions of a judge (Reason) which has the force of the law" (*Conflict,* 55).[95] Deleuze draws further attention to the "legitimate and illegitimate" employment of the various faculties, and describes the task of Kant's rational project as a directing of thought (specifically reason) away from "false problems and internal illusions" (namely excessive speculation beyond the bounds experience), towards a "higher interest" or harmony of the faculties (*Kant,* 25-27).

In the Kantian university, philosophy, as the "lowest faculty," persistently levels critiques (in public) against the pretensions to dogmatism of the other faculties. For Kant, the university, following the mind, should be ordered "according to reason," which is the "unique terrain of philosophy" (*Conflict,* 31, 35): philosophy employs its unique faculty of reason in order to pass judgment upon the other faculties in public, ensuring comportment towards rational ends, notably the realization of a cosmopolitan ethical future for humanity ("Universal History," 41-2, 45, 51-3). Kant accords a primacy to these ethical and cosmopolitan interests of reason against the speculative cognitive interest described in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (Nietzsche, *Will,* 24-8).

In Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/7)*,* the understanding with its concepts bounds sensations and their intuitions, while the understanding is itself subservient to reason, which provides it with ends. What is essential is that the faculties conform to Kant's "division of labour," and must relate to each other along pre-established channels.[96] With such a sadistic division of faculties according to the "higher ends of reason" the pernicious character of Kant's "public use of reason" juts to the fore

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[95] Despite this claim, Kant also asserts the "infinite task" of the conflict is to aid in the realization of human freedom and cosmopolitanism: "This conflict cannot end, and it is the philosophy faculty that must always be prepared to keep it going" (*Conflict,* 55).

[96] Despite this drive towards rational ordering, Deleuze also notes that Kant allows for the possibility of "illegitimate" relations between the various faculties, such as those which occur in judgments of the "sublime," in which reason overrides the interstitial imagination, acting directly upon sensations (*CPJ,* 140-143; 145; 147). See, Deleuze, *Kant* (24) and Rajan, "Introduction" (4).

(Deleuze, *Kant,* 4; Adorno, *DE,* 66-7, 74-5, 98).[97] Foucault intervenes upon Kant's "What is Enlightenment?" (1783) with his text of the same name (1984) to illuminate this new "enlightened" form of domination: "Obey, and you will be able to reason as much as you like"; that is, do not practice the "blind and foolish obedience" of early despotism, instead participate in a more "enlightened" form of totalitarianism: "adapt the use they make of their reason to these determined circumstances; and reason must then be subjected to the particular ends in view" ("Enlightenment," 36).

Despite this, Foucault repeatedly demonstrates the radical efficacy of Kantian enlightenment as a means to "give form to our impatience for liberty," providing a means for "the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them" ("Enlightenment," 50). Politically, Kant's imperative of enlightenment ("*Sapere aude*") remains a central rallying cry for Adorno, as for Foucault, who sees enlightenment in a radically anarchist sense as an "art of not being governed," in which one gains autonomy through intellectual resistance to techniques of power (Foucault, "What is Critique?" 45-49, 58-61). Or, following Adorno, through critique one can gain "intellectual maturity" (Adorno, *CM:* 281-2).[98]

Though Kant is largely a thinker of "practical reason"—one who chose to "limit knowledge in order to make room for faith" (*CPR,* 117)—there are a plethora of moments in the critical project in which Kant seemingly transgresses his own boundaries and his limitation of philosophy to mere "possible experience." These domains, most notably related to aesthetics and nature, can be deconstructed and read "against the

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[97] The "sadistic" character of Kantian rationality is described in the section "Juliette or Enlightenment and Morality" of *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (63-93). As Adorno and Horkheimer write: "Self preservation is the constitutive principle of [Kantian] science, the soul of the table of categories...As long as one does not ask who is applying it, reason has no greater affinity than with mediation; depending on the situation of individuals and groups , it presents, either peace or war, tolerance or repression, as the given state of affairs...Sade demonstrated empirically what Kant grounded transcendentally: the affinity between knowledge and planning which has set its stamp of inescapable functionality on a bourgeois existence rationalized even in its breathing spaces"(*DE,* 68-9). These considerations are developed further by J. Lacan in "Kant with Sade" (645-670).

[98] Arendt has also explored the political efficacy of the Kantian program, see, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (22-27, 43-6, 76-77).

grain," continuing the critical project in experimental directions.[99] Exemplary of this is Kant's discussion of "reflective judgment" (*CPJ,* 80-82), which seems to open the possibility of an alternative logic of judgment other than that of the "schematism" between the imagination and understanding as presented in the *CPR* (268-277). Or Kant's discussion of "The Sublime" (*CPJ,* 128-159), which has been argued— most aptly by Lyotard — to contain the potential for the development of a new thought of (aesthetic) experience.[100] More broadly, Kant's *CPJ* can be seen as meta-critically reflecting upon his own strict delineation of philosophy, while providing the conceptual lexicon for the speculative invasions of German-Idealism-Romanticism, but also for a diverse array of twentieth-century thinkers, such as Adorno and Arendt, along with Lyotard, and Deleuze. Deleuze specifically elevates the *CPJ* as a text which "uncovers a deeper and free and indeterminate accord of the faculties" (*Kant,* 68), illustrating the potential of interdisciplinary invasions of the Kantian project.

Schelling, in his *On University Studies* (*Vorlesungen über die Methode des Akademischen Studiums*, 1803), pushes against the bureaucratic Kantian understanding of both philosophy and the university, conceptualizing the vocation of philosophy in a speculative and unconditioned sense. That which in Kant was permitted "regulatively" is given a "constitutive" role in Schelling's absolute Idealism, which does not oppose mind to nature (or subject to object), but sees them as differences in degree, containing differing "potencies" or levels of organization of the same absolute. Further, Schelling (and Adorno) uncouple Kant's stable relation between the empirical and the transcendental, (re)imagining such a relation in reciprocally troubling directions. In Schelling the strict Kantian delineation of the faculties (along with their conflict) is re-territorialized within a larger "organic unity" of thought: "in philosophy, nature and God,

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[99]Such post-Kantian critical appropriations of the Kantian program were already being undertaken in the immediate aftermath of Kant's critical project (by Jacobi, Hamann and Herder), See *Beiser,* Fate (4-6, 16-89, 127-164).

[100] Lyotard has extensively commented upon Kant's notion of the sublime, most notably in *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime* (1991), and in relation to modern art, specifically the abstract expressionism of Barnet Newman which is read as providing a framework through which to theorize new relations to temporality. See *The Inhuman* (8-118, 135-144). More remains to be said about the polyphony of possible connections between Lyotard and Adorno, an affinity which Lyotard himself recognized in "Adorno as the Devil," which elaborates his own engagement with Adorno's aesthetics via the image of Adorno as "the devil" in T. Mann's *Doctor Faustus* (127-37).

science and art, religion and poetry are linked with each other from the beginning...The subject of philosophy is primordial knowledge itself" (*US,* 75). Contra Kant, for Schelling, philosophy does not have a strict delineation with respect to the other disciplines, but rather, should animate intellectual inquiry with a youthful spirit which "strive[s] for the one truly Absolute knowledge… until [it] has perfectly grasped the whole as unity" (*US,* 69). Schelling underscores that both "science and art are moving in that [absolute] direction" (*US,* 69). Beyond the negative Kantian understanding of philosophy as "critique," Schelling conceives of thought in an expanded sense as "absolutizing" the insights from particular sciences; at the same time, in potentially deterritorializing ways, philosophy is exposed to, and made to tarry with, the life-sciences, history, and religion: counter-scientific domains which contest its autarky.[101] Schelling opposes the primacy of practical reason (or ethics) in the Kantian project, decrying that "an alleged morality" (*US,* 71)—along with practical cries for "Action! Action!" (*US,* 12)—were supposed by Kant (along with Fichte) to take the place of genuine intellectual speculation and the development of a true "theoretical philosophy" (*US,* 71). If for Kant, "Philosophy is the purely autonomous moment when knowledge reflects upon itself" (Readings, 66), for Schelling (and other Idealist-Romantics), philosophy becomes a theorization of the "organic unity" behind the diversity of disciplinary strivings, a conquest of "the whole," of the "spiritual bond that is missing" (Hegel, *PS,* 2; Adorno, *Hegel,* 62).

Schelling's *On University Studies* is heavily *Frühromantik,* seeing philosophy as "absolutizing," "potentiating"—or "quickening with freedom" (*FO,* 14)—various disciplines such that they can participate in the broader unfolding of the absolute. However, in Schelling's early *Naturphilosophie* and middle work, the ur-productivity, or "original diremption of nature itself," continually contests the stability of the

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[101] Derrida describes Schelling's critique of the Kantian project as a deconstruction of the autonomy Kant accords to philosophy: "The criticism directed at Kant has two imports: the Kantian point of view gives the philosophical discipline at once too little and too much. Too little: It limits it to being only one discipline among others. Too much: it gives it a faculty. Schelling does not beat around the bush and proposes quite simply that there no longer be any department of philosophy. Not so as to erase philosophy from the university map, but on the contrary, in order to recognize its true place, which is the entire place" (Derrida, "Theology of Translation," *Eyes,* 72, cf. 170).

philosophical system (*FO,* 205). Philosophy enters into contestatory relations with the natural sciences and theology, as it speculatively annexes other disciplines in an effort to reckon with the unstable dynamism of the absolute. As will be argued in Ch. 5, such a conflict between nature and the philosophical system, as enacted in Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* and "middle work" (1809-1821), results in a negatively dialectical conception of philosophy, which can be seen in relation to Adorno's negative dialectic. Moving beyond Kant, Schelling develops a formulation of philosophy that is not the autonomous seat of reason, but rather, continually invades and tangles with other disciplines and systems of knowledge. Adorno's negative dialectic performs a similar invasion—or speculative potentiation—of various disciplines: employing psychoanalysis as a prism through which to analyze philosophy's "natural history (*ND,* 22-23; *DE,* 36-37; Cook *Nature,* 47-60, 107, 12); sociology as a means to open philosophy towards "society" (or its material historical context, *Sociology,* 27-34, 44-6, 141-4, 152-3); and aesthetics to short circuit philosophy's totalizing ambitions (*AT*, 262), while exploring novel relations with the natural world (*AT,* 64-72).

With Hegel, philosophy becomes a tragic encyclopedia that marks and eulogizes the various "patterns of consciousness" [*Gestalten*][102] in their progression throughout history, a process typified in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (*Phänomenologie des Geistes*, 1807. *PS, 56; PG,* 80). As Rajan states, "Going beyond Kant, who tried to unify the liberal arts under the rubric of philosophy as method, Hegel claimed a greater specificity for philosophy by introducing 'Idealism' into 'all the sciences'" ("Introduction," 4). Hegel's philosophy can be considered "encyclopedic," given its proclaimed task of systematically organizing other disciplines in their progression towards "absolute knowing." Such a historical progression is mirrored logically in Hegel's dialectic—or "triadic logic" (*PS,* 29-30; *EL,* 38-9)—in which conflicts and antinomies are reconciled or "sublated" [*Aufhebung*] within the larger "organic unity" of truth (*PS,* 2). As Hegel writes, "The True is the whole. But the whole is nothing other than the essences consummating itself through its development" (*PS,* 11). Hegel sees philosophy as a

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[102] Describing this in his *PS,* Hegel writes: "[Phenomenology], in terms of its content, is the Science [*Wissenschaft*] of the experience of consciousness [*Erfahrung des Bewußtseins*] ...Thus the moments of the whole are patterns/shapes [*Gestalten*] of consciousness" *(PS, 56; PG,* 80).

mediatory practice, which traces or narrates the development of *Spirit* [*Geist*] through its various instantiations. However, as many post-Hegelian thinkers have noted, such a systematic logic erases particular conflicts in favour of a logic of "synthesis" or "reconciliation," which sees philosophy and history as the "working out" of reason, violently subsuming particular dissonant moments.[103] In this sense, the conflict of the faculties is mediated by way of the larger "organic unity," mitigating the "conflict," which is sublated and disappears in favour of unity and the final triumph of philosophy.

Despite the desire for reconciliation and unity that pervades Hegel's thought, Hegel's system contains within itself a profound negative element, which "un-works" (to evoke Blanchot's term *désœuvrement,*) its own desire for systematic resolution or culmination (*Literature,* 171-76). As Hegel writes in his *Phenomenology:*

> The circle that remains self-enclosed and, like substance, holds its moments together, is an immediate relationship, one therefore which has nothing astonishing about it. But that an accident as such, detached from what circumscribes it, what is bound and is actual only in its context with others, should attain an existence of its own and a separate freedom—this is the tremendous power of the negative...but the life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself...Spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it. (*PS,* 18-19)

Hegel's project attempts to theorize philosophy, along with the university, as a holistic organic system, while nonetheless giving a dangerous degree of autonomy to the individual members: erecting a system which tarries with "death...and devastation," along with the particularity of experience, allowing a troubling array of contingencies into the philosophical system. The possibility that an "accident" could gain a certain freedom is, and must remain, a possibility for the Hegelian project as I will argue in my final chapter on Hegel (Ch. 6). Perhaps more than any other thinker Adorno seeks to employ this

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[103] In a Canadian context, such a conciliatory drive for reconciliation and recognition is exemplified in the work and policy programs of (the Hegelian) Charles Taylor. Most notably his 1994, *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition* [Ed.] (see "Preface, ix-xii, "The Politics of Recognition," 25-74)*,* which attempts to theorize (Canadian) multiculturalism through a Hegelian lens, locating a political-existential need for a "recognition" of the various conflicting groups in the nation state (such as French and English Canada). Taylor's "Right-Hegelianism" covers over the negative and dissonant moments inherent in the Canadian nation state, refusing to recognize difference out of a placatory drive for resolution. For an in-depth critique of such Hegelian infused policies from an indigenous perspective and by way of Fanon, see Coulthard, *Red Skin White Mask,* (25-31).

"tremendous power of the negative," and in so doing develops his own theory of negative mediation, one which emphasizes the conflict of the faculties, rather than their unity, or reconciliation. Adorno's post-Idealism commences by rejecting Hegelian totality ("the whole is the false" [*MM,* 50, 16-18]): uncoupling the organic unity of the Hegelian project, turning towards "accident," or those moments which are able to win a "separate freedom," marginal domains such as aesthetics or nature which are able to trouble the unity of the Hegelian encyclopedia.

## 2.2   Adorno's Conflict of the Faculties: Negative Dialectical Mediation

"Idealism is not simply untruth. It is truth in its un-truth." Adorno, *Against Epistemology,* 234.

The following sections will chart three entwined valences of Adorno's negative dialectic in relation to the main senses of Adorno's conflict between the faculties. Firstly, Adorno's historical-philosophical perspective instigates a conflict within the Idealist tradition, positioning the "subjective Idealism" of Kant against the "absolute-Idealism" of Hegel. The second sense motivates an originary epistemic conflict (via Kant and Hegel) between mind and world, recognizing the "primacy of the object," or the preponderance of the world in tension with the concepts of the subject. The final sense transfers these traditional and epistemic conflicts into the very organization of knowledge, placing various disciplines in conflict with each other, while challenging the autonomy of philosophy by way of what, borrowing Foucault's term, we can somewhat approximately call the "counter-sciences" of sociology and psychoanalysis (2.2.1-2.2.2). The final section of this chapter (2.3) will chart the conflictual relation of identity-in-difference that Adorno elaborates between philosophy and the production and reception of art (or art and aesthetics).

Adorno's philosophy elaborates a "changed concept of the dialectic" (Rose, *Melancholy,* 97-104), one in which negativity or non-synthesis are emphasized in opposition to reconciliation and unity. In terms of the organization of knowledge, Adorno refuses to reify or standardize the conflict between faculties, continually opening contestatory relations between the various domains of knowledge, such that "conflict" (or negativity) becomes the unifying motif of thought and its organization. Such a re-constellated dialectic draws upon a vast array of thinkers (Benjamin, Marx, Freud,

Nietzsche and Lukács), though fundamentally it stages a "meta-critique of Idealism" (Jarvis, 148-74), confronting the epistemic modesty of the Kantian subject with the encyclopedic ambition of a (materialist reading) of Hegel. Adorno describes the negative dialectic as "seek[ing] to free dialectics from its…affirmative traits without reducing its determinacy," overturning the "traditional" notion (of Plato and Hegel) which sought to "achieve something positive by way of negation" (*ND,* xix). By rejecting what he sees as the "affirmative character" of Hegel's dialectic (*ND,* 143-61)—which upheld a speculative identity between thought and being, subject and object, "identity and non-identity"—Adorno elaborates his own negative model of speculative non-identity, founded on the "non-identity" between such terms, affirming difference against "the antagonistic entirety of" Hegel's organic unities (*ND,* 4-12).[104]

In terms of the tradition of philosophy, the negative dialectic involves the deconstruction of various binaries within the Idealist tradition—notably subject-object, transcendental-empirical, theory-practice, aesthetics-philosophy, nature-history, and system-experience—which are then interrogated in relation to each other, though never reconciled into some higher unity. In this manner, philosophy is fractured into a precarious and fragmentary practice that can no longer hope to "settle" conflicts once and for all: tension, conflict and "non-identity" will always prevail over reconciliation, unity and "identity." As a dialectical (materialist) thinker, Adorno never dispenses with the historical-social mediation of particular objects. Through a "micrological" immersion in particular objects, the critic is able to see the object as mediated within a social totality; however, the object is not fully reduced to its presence within such a totality (*ND,* 18, 408; *Prisms,* 229, 240). Within a theory of negative mediation, or thought in the absence of totality, objects are endowed with a "natural-historical" character: their seemingly "natural" or independent existence is decoded as a historical rebus.

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[104] For a description of the "speculative identity thesis" as it pertains to Hegel (and Schelling), see Ng (65-124). Broadly stated, Hegel posits an organic, or absolute relation, of "identity in non-identity" (76) between "subjective subject-object" and "objective subject-object" (71). That is, subject and object are seen as differing perspectives on the same absolute relation between subject and object. For Adorno, instead of mediating the two polarities by way of a common organic identity, subject and object are recognized as perpetually non-identical, as held together in their difference or "non-identity" (*ND,* 6-8). Put otherwise, Adorno inverts the Hegelian primacy of identity towards non-identity.

Adorno's thought moves against Hegel's "absolute spirit," while refashioning the Hegelian notion of "mediation": instead of mediating (or "sublating") difference by way of a higher synthesis (Paddison, 108-121; Hegel, *EL,* 128-131), Adorno provides a negative model of mediation, which can be understood (following Benjamin) as a form of mediation through "the extremes" (*OT,* 38). Objects are not reducible to their position within some larger unity (or organic "identity"), but rather, are understood in themselves as "non-identities," or differences, which continually disrupt the finality of conceptual cognition (*ND,* 11-12). In a materialist vein, Adorno likens the command of particular "non-identities" to the domination of all "use-values" by way of "exchange value" in capitalist reproduction (*ND,* 143-61, 3). By rejecting Hegelian totality and notions of synthesis at the outset, Adorno develops his logic of the constellation, which seeks to mediate particular elements between themselves, arranging entities in mosaics and constellations in order to realize a negative encyclopedia of knowledge without reference to a determinate "whole" (*MM,* 50; *ND,* 162-166). Such a model is immensely indebted to Benjamin's formula of "the Idea"— "in which the unique and the extreme stand together" (*OT,* 38-41)—a formula that will be explored in more depth in the following chapters devoted to Benjamin (specifically sections 3.4 & 4.3.3.3).

Adorno short-circuits the absolute tendency of the Hegelian encyclopedia by way of the Kantian primacy of the subject, an essential epistemic modesty that must be continually maintained, expressing skepticism towards the possibility of a holistic philosophical system. Epistemically, Adorno's "negative dialectic" foregrounds a constitutive finitude—a fundamental "block" at the heart of knowledge (*Kant,* 18, 170-80)—contending that "objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder...the concept does not exhaust the thing conceived" (*ND,* 5). Adorno's thesis of the "primacy of the object" necessitates a commitment to a Kantian model of perception, in which the world—or "possible experience"—is invariably shaped by subjective concepts and categories.[105] However, Adorno's model of metaphysical

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[105] For Adorno, in order to move against reification and undertake such a critical self-reflection, philosophy must open itself towards precarity and particularity; that is, it must recognize the "primacy (or literally, the prior-rank) of the object" [*Vorrang des Objeckts*]: that the world or experience is not fully exhausted by the concept (*ND,* 183-188 // 182-7). Thought must enact an "axial turn" (*ND,* xx) of Kant's Copernican

experience dispenses with the Kantian *"phenomena-noumena"* distinction that would separate out experience from its transcendental conditions. Instead, Adorno (following Benjamin) aims to think "experience" beyond the Kantian schematism, that is, beyond its degradation to mere "possible experience"— the determinate application of concepts to possible cases. With such an expansive understanding of experience, Adorno employs a Kantian "reflective" model of judgment, in which philosophy (via a "micrological gaze") absolutizes a particular moment (*CPJ,* 15-20).[106]

Though Adorno continues many Hegelian critiques of Kantian thought—notably Kant's denial of metaphysics while simultaneously begging metaphysical questions—he also preserves key elements of the Kantian project, notably Kant's doctrine of "reflective judgment," along with the supposition of an unavoidable subjective or "perspectivist" starting point for philosophy (Nietzsche, *Will,* 267). Adorno contends that any philosophical system—no matter its encyclopedic grandeur or "objectivity"—is ultimately shot through with the same pathologies that beset the individual. Hence the repeated employment of a Nietzschean infused model of psychoanalysis throughout Adorno's thinking, which continually presents the philosophical subject alongside its pathological moments, or offshoots.[107] Though Adorno repeatedly posits the "primacy of the object" (*ND,* 183-97, 6-8) as an antidote to the Idealist "fallacy of constitutive subjectivity" (*ND,* xx), he nonetheless remains committed to an irreducible and necessary

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revolution, that is, a shift away from the mind and towards the object, without fully collapsing the Idealist "subject-object" dichotomy. Adorno names this thought of contradiction, or "consistent sense of non-identity," dialectics (*ND,* 5). Such an ironic and distanced employment of language thinks "in contradiction," against thought, attempting to preserve a dissonant space of utopia (*ND,* 3-6; cf. *Epistemology,* 1-7).

[106] More remains to be said regarding the relationship between Adorno's "micrological gaze" and the Kantian notion of reflective judgment, which elevates particular elements without a prescribed rule. Adorno explores such ideas in his essay on Kracauer's "curious realism"—his critical model of sociological-phenomenology (*NL II:* 59-75).

[107] Much remains to be said apropos of Adorno's relationship with Nietzsche, a thinker who plays a subterranean role throughout Adorno's oeuvre, providing it with its sharply historical-genealogical sentiment. As Adorno curiously remarks in his lectures on moral philosophy, "It is not at all my intention to score points off Nietzsche, since to tell the truth, of all the so-called great philosophers I owe him by far the greatest debt, more even than to Hegel" (*Moral,* 172). Both thinkers continually seek to historically contest the stability of origins underwriting philosophical truth claims, expressing suspicion of the philosophical "will to truth."

moment of subjectivity in any philosophical program against the positivist or empiricist "views from nowhere."

The negative dialectic can be further clarified in terms of what Cook has termed its "subjective and objective aspects" (*Adorno-Foucault,* 23-24). In terms of the subjective epistemic dimension, negative dialectics maintains the tension between the "subject-object": upholding the imperative that objects are irreducible to subjective categories, along with the recognition that any experience of "the object" will be minimally mediated by the categories and pathologies of "the subject" (*ND,* 5). Negative dialectics commences by recognizing that reality is always primary, or in excess of philosophy's conceptual categories (as Kant argued), while at the same time, it refuses to uphold some pure unmediated "givenness"—or a "nature"—independent of the mediation of the faculties of the mind (as Hegel would have it). In terms of the objective dimension, Adorno metamorphoses this dialectical epistemic tension into antinomies within the tradition of thought, and within the distribution of the university, accentuating conflicts between aesthetics and philosophy, along with philosophy and various "counter-sciences." Such domains fracture philosophy, revealing the "objective" antagonisms of enlightenment and late-capitalist society— the "preponderance of the universal," or those pernicious abstractions which tower over the individual (Cook, *Adorno-Foucault,* 24; Benhabib, 33-34)— while also beginning to formulate alternative thought models through which to relate to the (natural) world. Philosophy must think in "contradictions" in order to stress the contradictory nature of reality, with "dialectics" marking the thought of philosophy against itself, a "dissonant" "guilt of what I am thinking" that provides a "determinate negation of society" (*ND,* 4-6). Adorno's negative dialectic—or model of metaphysical experience (*ND,* 1-57)—should be seen as a refashioned form of subjective transcendental Idealist philosophy (O'Connor, 15) enacted within a Hegelian framework, which seeks to provide a new and expanded logic of the concept alongside a viable model of objective social critique. Keeping with the Kantian parallel between the faculties of the mind and university, the negative dialectic can be transposed into the organization of knowledge more broadly, providing a conflictual and self-reflexive model for the practice of social research.

In the following sections, the final valence of Adorno's conflict will be analyzed, considering Adorno's negative model of (inter) disciplinarity, a task which may seem anathema given his persistent assertions regarding the "dominating character" of the philosophical system (*ND* 26-28; *AT*, 64-65).[108] Despite such provisos, I contend that Adorno's thought provides a post-Idealist negation of the controlling impulse of philosophy, striving to "explode Idealism from within" in the creation of an "anti-system" that would allow thought to become "actual" in the face of the horrors of the twentieth-century (*Lectures ND*, 22; *ND*, xx; 10). It is this questioning of the "actuality of philosophy" in the face of material-social givenness that pervades Adorno's "late work,"[109] specifically his *Negative Dialectics* (1966) and *Aesthetic Theory* (1970), texts which elaborate Adorno's mature response to crises of philosophy, history, politics, and the ongoing subjugation of the natural world. The negative dialectic opens traditional Idealist models by way of material-historical givenness, creating what Rajan terms an "Idealism without absolutes": an Idealism fractured (though not dissolved) by materiality and non-identity, which allows Idealism to reflect upon its own pathologies and pretensions to absolute identity and systematicity.[110] Despite such a critical fracturing,

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[108] Adorno speaks of a naturalistic desire for control, or domination, inherent in many Idealist categories, which (out of fear of alterity) seek to reduce the plethora of objects to conceptual categories. For more on the dominating character of Idealism, see Vogel (84, 89, 96-100, 112, 132); *DE* (1); *ND* (11, 67). For more on the "control of nature" in Adorno, see *ND* (11, 67); *DE* (1-3).

[109] Weber- Nicholsen, in *Exact Imagination, Late Work...,* (1997) elevates Adorno's concept of "late work" (along with "exact imagination") as a figure for understanding Adorno's aesthetics, though such a notion can be applied to his post-World War Two writings more generally. For Adorno, "the essential feature of late work [is] the disjunction of subject and objectivity, so that as a work becomes late it becomes increasingly inorganic" (Nicholsen, 8). That is, "late works," such as Beethoven's final string quartets, express (through subjective self-sacrifice) an exile, or alienation from one's milieu—a discordance between soul and form. "Late style" emphasizes the primacy of form and formal moments over and against the expressions of the individual, conveying the death of the individual "allegorically" by way of the form of the artwork: "Death is imposed only on created beings, not on works of art, and thus it has appeared in art only in a refracted mode as allegory" (Adorno, "Late Style, 566). As Adorno concludes: "In the history of art, late works are catastrophes" (*Ibid*., 566). More remains to be said regarding the relationship of Adorno's notion of "late work" to Benjamin's notions of allegory and natural history. For more on "late work" see Adorno, "Late Style in Beethoven" (1937), "Alienated Masterpiece: The *Missa Solemnis* (1959)," along with Said's 2004, "Thoughts on Late Style."

[110] To reiterate, an Idealism without absolutes "brings materiality into conjunction with ideality"; "as an analogue to *différance* or heterogeneity, materiality...disturbs all absolutes" (Rajan, *"*Introduction," 2). Rajan focuses primarily on Romanticism as a practice which decomposes and hybridizes Idealism such that it is able to reflect upon itself and its own trajectories towards "Identity" (*"*Introduction," 2-3). One can see an analogue in Adorno's "meta-critical" reflection upon the German philosophical tradition, where thinkers

Adorno maintains a degree of (negative) systematicity, and his work can be read as providing experimental models of philosophical presentation and grounding (within the tradition of Idealism). Thus, contra Deleuze and other meta-philosophical interrogators of metaphysics in the twentieth-century, Adorno repeatedly resists the post-Heideggerian movement of philosophy to ontology (*ND,* 61-128; *Kant,* 3). Instead, Adorno maintains a minimal Kantian "subjective-Idealist" starting point for thinking, in productive tension with a Hegelian speculative notion of experience and model of negative mediation. In the following sections, the disciplinary implications of Adorno's negative dialectic will be considered.

## 2.2.1 Adorno and the "Counter-Sciences": Opening the Transcendental

"Man, in the analytic of finitude, is a strange empirico-transcendental doublet, since he is a being such that knowledge will be attained in him of what renders all knowledge possible." Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 318.

Adorno does not dogmatically hold to traditional philosophical categories, nor does he wholly "throw the baby out with the bathwater" (*MM,* 43-5); instead, he endeavours to immanently work through Idealist categories in relation to the events of his present. Following crisis, philosophy must fashion new critical perspectives to confront the reification of both the mind and society, posing the fundamental questions of philosophy anew, and inquiring as to the existential possibility of abstract thought in the face of the disaster. In relation to crisis, Adorno does not appeal to some eternal value of philosophy, nor to the enduring efficacy of a-historical concepts and categories; instead, he continually emphasizes the "finitude of thought" (*Lectures ND,* 76-86; *ND,* 13-15). That is, after the failure of the systematic Idealist project, philosophy must recognize its own finitude, putting itself at existential risk in the face of material-historical givenness, questioning its very existence, and interrupting the stability of its suppositions.[111] Adorno

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are decomposed into "force-fields" of material-social trajectories (while not wholly reducing them to such forces), allowing philosophy to critically reflect upon itself.

[111] Describing finitude and precarity as essential to philosophical thinking, Adorno will write: "The fact that philosophy does not have any particular guaranteed object of study; it is possible to think philosophically only where thinking can go awry, where it is fallible. The moment that nothing can happen to philosophical thought, that is, the moment it finds itself in the realm of repetition, mere reproduction, at that moment philosophy will have missed its mark" (*Lectures ND,* 85). For Adorno, philosophy must put its constitutive categories at risk in relation to historical events: "I believe it is not an exaggeration to say

responds by opening the transcendental (subject) and empirical/experiential (object) polarities of philosophy, considering those empirical or experiential moments which affect philosophy's fundamental categories. Adorno's notion of "metaphysical experience" allows such an opening of thought, while remaining within a transcendental-systematic framework (*Lectures ND,* 76-86, 183-210; *ND,* 361-408). Like Foucault, Adorno problematizes static notions of the transcendental, opening it to history, society and experience, contesting philosophy's autarky by way of its margins.

Following both post-Kantian German Idealism and Benjamin, Adorno notes the impoverished role played by experience within the Kantian architectonic. Instead of attempting to determine the infinity of "all possible experience" by way of a finite table of categories, "Philosophy itself [must] become infinite—namely not as something to be fixed any longer in a restricted number of theorems as we find in Kant's 'system of principles,' but fundamentally open" (*Lectures ND,* 80). That is, philosophy must be open to (historical) "experiences" [*Erfahrungen*] and events which should prompt a fundamental revision of its concepts and categories: the articulation of a new permeable relationship between these poles—of experience and systematicity (or the transcendental)—is an important upshot of Adorno's work. Such an opening of philosophy to a broader array of experiences places Adorno fundamentally in line with German Idealists such as Hegel and Schelling, who refuse to confine philosophy to a mere faculty (as Kant purports to do), but rather, theorize reason in a polyphonic and interdisciplinary way. Such a movement towards experience does not necessitate a dispensation of the transcendental; instead, Adorno (along with Hegel and Schelling), theorizes new (non-) identical relations between philosophy and experience.

With such a (re)turn to key elements of absolute Idealist philosophy Adorno directly contravenes many of the intellectual conventions of his age, presenting an after-image of Idealism after its supposed "failure" (with Hegel's death in 1831).[112] Broadly

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that to this day the question of whether philosophy can exist without system has not been tackled with the serious energy it calls for" (*Lectures ND,* 39).

[112] Schnädelbach locates the "end" of Idealism (or "great philosophy"), and the broader "Age of Goethe" in 1831-2, the years of Hegel and Goethe's death respectively (1). Following this period, European humanism went through a protracted period of crisis and modernization, culminating in the 1933 dissolution of the

stated, the intellectual currents of early twentieth-century Germany eschewed the Idealism of Hegel and Schelling as hopelessly failed metaphysical programs, and instead sought to return thought to its sure scientific basis in the (Neo) Kantian program, or the fundamental grounding of a positivist, phenomenological, or neo-ontological perspective (Bosanquet 199-201; Schnädelbach, 1, 8-10, 106, 67-71, 192- 217).

Opposed to Bosanquet's lamentation of the movement from "post-Kantian Idealism" to "Neo-Kantianism" (200), Schnädelbach presents a neutral Weberian survey of the decline and splintering of Idealism between 1831 and 1933 (1-11). Beginning with the 1830-48 political crises of German nationalism in the wake of the French-Revolution, and the more general end of the "age of Goethe" (1831-2), Schnädelbach charts the decline and splintering of Idealism. He surveys the decline of its absolute notion of "system" (5-8, 27-9), along with the ascendancy of new disciplines such as "history" and (social and physical) "science," which replace Idealist notions, gaining their own disciplinary autonomy (33-65, 66-109).[113] Against these evacuations of philosophy, Adorno remains fundamentally holistic and interdisciplinary in a Schellingian-Hegelian sense, harnessing insights from emergent disciplines —notably sociology and psychoanalysis—while nonetheless remaining eminently Idealist in his philosophical temperament. That is, while Hegel and Schelling employ *Naturphilosophie* and aesthetics as a means to fracture philosophy, for Adorno, philosophy enters into a tensioned constellation with the emergent disciplines of sociology and psychoanalysis, in order to bring philosophy back to its constitutive finitude. This additional focus speaks to Adorno's modernist intellectual temperament, as he renews the actuality of Idealism by interrogating philosophy in relation to a constellation of specifically modern disciplines.

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Weimar republic. Within this period (1831-1933), philosophy still took place, though Schnädelbach interrogates "what, in a post-Idealist age, is philosophy, and how is what bears that name possible" (5).

[113] For Schnädelbach, the period 1831-1933 saw the emergence of history (or "the age of historicism") as an autonomous and dynamic discipline (33-5). Thinkers such as Marx (39-40), Burckhardt (42), and Dilthey (50-1), followed Hegel's elevation of history, seeking to rationally articulate historical dynamics. However, by the end of the century, thinkers such as Nietzsche expressed a disgust towards enlightenment notions of progress (62-3). This period also saw the emergence of modern "science" (both social and physical), undercutting German Idealism's monopoly on the term (67), or a movement away from Idealist *Wissenschaft,* to the more modern specialized understanding of the term "science." Disciplines such as sociology and psychology applied the methods of natural science to subjective spirit, while problematizing the subject as a site of epistemic security (73-4).

Both Adorno and Benjamin act as "modernist mandarins," moving against the "mandarin orthodoxy" of their academic context, critically employing the Idealist tradition against the academic grain (130-43).[114] That is, Adorno at once fractures Idealism by way of sociology and psychoanalysis, while also moving against his own academic milieu with his return to absolute Idealist philosophy.

Adorno's negative distribution of the university positions philosophy (or the positivity of knowledge) in relation to its margins in a manner akin to Foucault's "counter-sciences." For Foucault, such duplicitous domains continually emphasize the finite and precarious character of any intellectual artifice—leading philosophy back to its "analytic of finitude" (*Order,* 312-43)— while problematizing and opening the interaction between the empirical and transcendental domains of thought.[115] In the final chapters of his 1966 *The Order of Things* (303-87), following his archeology of the history of representation—from the Renaissance's "prose of the world " (17-45) through to the Classical episteme's tables (50-124), to Modernity's abysses and depths (217-94)—Foucault elaborates his own contestatory model of the human sciences, which has been considered in relation to the organization of knowledge and the 1960s University crisis by Rajan (in *Deconstruction,* 182-198). Foucault's archeological model opens discourse towards alterity while continually emphasizing the (un)making of the human,

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[114] Ringer, in *The Decline of the German Mandarins* (1969)*,* presents a survey of German intellectual culture from 1890-1933, examining its relation to the economic and industrial conditions of the time. Ringer charts the emergence of a Weberian "mandarin type": an educated member of the upper middle class, interpellated by a certain belief in *Bildung,* or mobility through vocational self-legislation, coupled with a belief in Idealist notions of social progress. Such types entered into an inevitable conflict with Modernity, constantly proclaiming a "crisis of culture, or "age of decadence" throughout the 1920s. Figures such as Adorno and Benjamin can be seen as "Modernist Mandarins" (202-212) who attempted to harness something of such a traditional culture in an immanent critique of culture by way of itself. For Benjamin as a "modernist mandarin" (a term coined by Habermas) see McCole (20).

[115] Deborah Cook's *Adorno, Foucault and the Critique of the West* (2018) provides a provisional groundwork for an interrogation of the work of Adorno and Foucault in dialogue, focusing on their respective relationships to Marxism ("Is Power Always Secondary to the Economy?", 31-61), psychoanalysis ("Notes on Individuation" 61-92), along with their more general shared critique of the dominating character of Western rationality. However, as Cook herself acknowledges, such a comparative study will generate more questions and lines of inquiry than definitive affinities. Notably, Cook accords little space to the early "archeological" writings of Foucault, many of which are published contemporaneously with the development of Adorno's negative dialectic, focusing instead on Foucault's later "genealogical" writings on power, disciplinarity, biopolitics and governmentality. More remains to be said on Foucault's relationship to the German Idealist tradition, specifically the spectre of Kant which haunts his writings in both periods. For more on Cook's text in relation to questions of intellectual history, see my 2021 "Review" Cook's text (80-4).

demonstrating that "man is an invention of a recent date. And one that is perhaps nearing its end; man may soon be erased, like a face drawn in the sand at the edge of the sea" (*Order,* 387; cf. ix-xiv, xv-xxiv).

Foucault highlights the role of "counter-sciences" in his project, discourses which "ceaselessly unmake that very man who is creating and recreating his positivity in the human sciences" (*Order,* 379). The counter-sciences continually demarcate the "frontier forms of the human sciences," leading the human back to their existence as an "empirico-transcendental doublet" within the "analytic of finitude," where "man composed his own figure in the interstices of that fragmented language" (*Order,*381, 386).[116] Describing such "counter-sciences" further, Foucault writes:

> In relation to the "human sciences", psychoanalysis and ethnology are rather "counter-sciences"; which does not mean that they are less "rational" or "objective" than the others, but that they flow in the opposite direction, that they lead them back to their epistemological basis, and that they ceaselessly "unmake" that very man who is creating and re-creating his positivity in the human sciences. (*Order,* 379)

Foucault singles out psychoanalysis and ethnology (or structural anthropology) as counter-sciences that act as an uncannier version of Kant's philosophy faculty: they critique the will to dogmatism of the other faculties (or Foucault's "human-sciences"), continually leading human thought back to its finitude and constitutive precarity. These "counter-sciences" provide thought with an "inexhaustible treasure-hoard of experiences and concepts, and above all a perpetual principle of dissatisfaction, of calling into question, of criticism and contestation of what may seem, in other respects, to be established" (*Order,* 373). As Rajan stresses, "Each human science has a corresponding counter science," exposing the human sciences' "doubled and duplicitous relation to

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[116] Foucault describes the "analytic of finitude" as "a question of revealing the conditions of knowledge on the basis of the empirical contents given in it," undercutting "each of these positive forms in which man can learn that he is finite is given to him only against the background of his own finitude" (*OT,* 319, 314). The Kantian elements of such a re-fashioned "analytic" are highly evident, and Foucault seems to locate Kant at the cross-roads of Modernity: "the end of metaphysics is only the negative side of a much more complex event in Western thought. This event is the appearance of man" (*Order,* 319). In the modern episteme, "man" emerges as a "transcendental empirical doublet," endowed with a new transcendental aesthetic (the anatomical physical moments of knowledge) and a new transcendental dialectic (the historical, economic and social conditions of knowledge), as Foucault attempts to reoriented knowledge around the finitude and historicity of the human.

knowledge" (*Deconstruction,* 193). Further, each counter science is reflexively critical, articulating itself upon another (counter) science by way of its "un-thought": for Foucault, psychoanalysis and ethnology continually contest each other. Rajan situates the final section of *The Order of Things* in relation to the (French) university crisis of the 1960s, positioning Foucault as a thinker of "the university in ruins," one who wants to reorder the university, not around the critical human sciences but around the counter sciences that remain uneasily on the fringes of the modern university" (*Deconstruction,* 195-6).  In a manner parallel to Adorno, Foucault's conflict of the faculties provides an "exposure without synthesis" (Rajan, *Deconstruction*, 196), in which so-called "man" in his positivity is both posited and unworked, archeologically questioning "not man himself...but the region that makes possible knowledge about man in general" (Foucault, *Order,* 378). In this way, neither Foucault nor Adorno provide explicit models for the reorganization of knowledge, but rather, they forward a new "interdisciplinary sometimes anti-disciplinary" conflictual animus in which knowledge comes to be organized according to conflict: "Foucault's 'order' is not a division by departments but a movement between fields of knowledge that exposes them to each other" (Rajan, *Deconstruction,* 197).

Likewise, Adorno's work can be seen as an attempt to ground modern philosophy in a new "analytic of finitude": emphasizing the precarity of thought as opposed to traditional comprehensive notions of the philosophical architectonic. However, where Foucault leads modern thought back to the un-thought abyss opened by its "analytic of finitude," Adorno leads philosophy back to its transcendental material-social conditions: in Foucault's abyss stands Capital. Adorno decodes the foundational mythologies of traditional thought, historicizing philosophy's a-historical proclivities by the transience of critique. For example, in *Against Epistemology,* Husserl's "pure" epistemological phenomenology is de-naturalized as a latent Idealism, which dominates alterity by way of the primacy it accords to the perceiving phenomenological subject (3-5, 14-17, 47-88, 217-9). Adorno un-works the positivity of knowledge (or the autarky of philosophy) by way of sociology and psychoanalysis, both of which continually open philosophy to the material-social and unconscious dimensions of thought. Both emphasize the various mediations philosophy finds itself entangled within, deterritorializing thought, and

creating conflict with respect to theory's foundational pretensions. The following section will briefly gloss these sites as a potential space through which to think a speculative notion of "counter-sciences," while examining the complex ways in which the historical-material constellation "society" is able to enter into thought. That is, both Adorno and Foucault seek to "dissolve man" (*Order,* 379) as a positive entity, fracturing the positivity of knowledge by way of counter-sciences (in the case of Foucault), and for Adorno, the material natural history of the subject provided by sociology and psychoanalysis.

## 2.2.2 Sociology, Psychoanalysis: Theorizing Social Mediation (Cognition and Society)

"In psycho-analysis nothing is true except the exaggerations." Adorno, *Minima Moralia,* 49.

Adorno continually interrogates philosophy, art, and culture more generally, in relation to "society," by which he means (in simplified Marxist terms) the material economic conditions (or "base") of ideas. The uniqueness of Adorno's Hegelian materialism lies in his opening of ideas to their transcendental societal conditions, while not wholly reducing them to their situation. As autonomous art is independent from, while also being conditioned by, social material forces; likewise, the ideas of philosophy are invariably marked by the social "force-field" out of which they arise. Adorno positions sociology in disciplinary conflict with philosophy, with sociology presenting a space in which "the real"—or the empirical material-historical realm— is able to enter into a dialogue with philosophy. Psychoanalysis is similarly employed to present the pathological moments inherent in "constitutive subjectivity" (*ND,* xx), that is, the abject and unconscious disavowals which condition the emergence of epistemic subjectivity. For Adorno, sociology and psychoanalysis are not external to philosophy, but rather, fundamental moments in its critical reflection upon itself, through which thought is opened to its unconscious conditions (by psychoanalysis), and material-social influences (by sociology).

Substantial research has already reconstructed the sociological dimensions of Adorno's work.[117] As Adorno underscores in his undergraduate course, *Introduction to Sociology* (1968), the foundational difficulty of understanding the "diffuse entity called sociology" lies in the articulation of what the precise limits of its object of inquiry are, given that "there is nothing… on earth… that is not mediated by society" (*Sociology*, 65).[118] That is "society"—understood as a constellation of material-historical forces— permeates everything, from the realm of culture, through to the natural world. Though he is a post-Idealist philosopher, Adorno's thought always already contains a substantial sociological-materialist dimension, in which seemingly natural or a-historical objects are

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[117] Most notable are Benzer's (2011) *The Sociology of Theodor Adorno*, which provides a lengthy, though fragmentary discussion of the main elements of Adorno's sociology. For Benzer, it is precisely the "anachronistic quality" (2) of Adorno's theoretical sociology, in relationship to contemporary empirical sociology, that makes his insights relevant. As such, Adorno can provoke theoretical reflection upon contemporary sociological categories along with sociology's ambiguous status as a discipline (231-43). For Benzer, Adorno's analyses bring awareness to the "doubled character" (234) of sociological research: one must come to understand the total mediation of all objects and methods by the nebulous notion of "society." Benzer, further stresses the performative dimensions of Adorno's "writing" of sociology (162-97), describing the inseparability of form and content in Adorno's sociology: in performatively "writing" sociology, Adorno deconstructs and reflects upon the categories he employs. Gillian Rose's *The Melancholy Science* (1978), along with *Hegel Contra Sociology* (1981), represent her attempts to formulate a Hegelian-Marxist approach to the social sciences. In *Melancholy,* Rose situates Adorno's sociology between the methodological antinomies of Weber and Durkheim, contradictions which Adorno attempts to overcome in the development of his own dialectical approach to social research (105-11). Rose further provides an extensive gloss of the use and abuse of the notion of "reification" as it applies to Adorno and the tradition more generally (33-66). Eric Oberle's *Theodor Adorno and the Century of Negative Identity* (2018) provides an extensive analysis of Adorno's wartime programs of social research, specifically the chapters, "Critical Theory Goes to War: The Critique of Positive Identity and Positive Science," and "Negative Modeling: Objectivity, Normativity, and the Refusal of the Universal." (131-241). *The Positivism Dispute* (1981) provides a collection and summary of the "*Positivismusstreit*" [Positivism-Dispute] of 1961 between Karl Popper, Hans Albert, Adorno and Habermas related to methodological questions of the social sciences (1-86, 105-122). Finally, Jameson (*Late Marxism,* 1-12) sees Adorno as dialectically revolutionizing the social sciences, providing a powerful method by which to import ethics into sociology (8).

[118] As Adorno repeatedly warns his students, a substantial difficulty of sociological study is its lack of a deductive method: society must be understood as a mediatory constellation which must be inquired after by "an agglomerate of disciplines" (*Sociology,* 4-7). In attempting to overcome the disciplinary division of labour imposed upon it "from the outside," sociology draws organically from philosophy, psychology, psychoanalysis, economics, history, and political economy (*Sociology,* 109). However, Adorno is careful to stress that sociology should not become a discipline which preaches "inter-disciplinarity on every corner" (*Sociology,* 109), but rather, sociology has the more Hegelian task of studying universal systems of mediation. In this way, sociology's most proximate faculty is philosophy, and Adorno genealogically locates sociology's inaugural moments in a dialogue with the positivism of Comte (*Sociology,* 9-12). Adorno's comment, "there is nothing on heaven and earth not mediated by society" is a direct reference to Hegel's comments in *The Science of Logic* on the "mediated immediacy" of any philosophical starting point (46-9).

opened to their own history via critique: "the categories used are not only so-called systematic categories developed from concepts, but are always also, and intentionally, historical categories" (*Sociology,* 144). A sociology of music, for example, is not external or pre-emptive to musical analysis, but rather an integral part of a critical approach to music and "listening" (*New Music*, 22-25; *Sociology of Music,* x-xii, 1-20). Adorno's philosophical sociology seeks to expose the social historical dimension of both natural attitudes and of objects more generally, a practice which has a substantial Nietzschean dimension (Adorno, *Moral,* 172; Rose, *Melancholy,* 24-34). By exposing philosophical "truths" as historical construction, or by contesting philosophy by way of its material-historical conditions, Adorno provides a means to employ materialism in an Idealist and non-reductive manner. That is, Adorno locates thinkers in transcendental historical-material force-fields, while not totally reducing them to their situation, and further refashions elements their philosophy to interpret the historical dynamics of their material situation, as Kierkegaard's "bourgeois interior" is read to reveal the class relations of the post-1848 era (see "Construction of Inwardness," 24-46).

Adorno's studies on Husserl and Kant also exemplify such materialist interventions. He locates these thinkers materially, "in truth," that is, as ciphers to their historical "force-field," while simultaneously redeeming elements of their thought in the elaboration of his own negative dialectic. With respect to Kant, Adorno at once appropriates key elements of his epistemology (as I argue throughout part 1), while concurrently fracturing Kant's thinking by way of its sociological and psychoanalytic conditions. Adorno sees Kant as the height of a form of "bourgeois subjectivity," with all its repressions and class undercurrents, while nonetheless affirming Kant's philosophical contributions (*Kant,* 73-80, 110-116,170-80). Adorno further works to reformulate the relationship between theory and practice such that the social-historical dimension is not external to philosophy, in that philosophy must "apply" itself to the world in some belated form of "practice," but rather, following Lukács, theory is always already a form of *praxis*.[119] As Rose has pointed out, Adorno's sociological analyses form an aspect of

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[119] Paraphrasing Lukács (of *History and Class Consciousness*), Adorno will write, "Thinking is a doing, theory a form of practice" (*CM,* 261). For more on Adorno's insistence on the "theoretical" nature of "practice," see "Relation to Left-Wing Hegelianism" (*ND,* 143-4).

his re-imagined dialectic (*Melancholy,* 97-104), one which recognizes the social dimension inherent in all cognition, seeing even the most "natural" elements stand as social ciphers.[120]

Adorno is often accused of being excessively pessimistic or denying *a priori* the possibility of (revolutionary) political action. Indeed, it does appear that Adorno provides few avenues for theory to conceptualize a way out of the late capitalist charnel house in which "there is nothing left un-maimed" (*CM,* 253). Adorno regulatively clings to the existence of a negative utopian "something more" beyond the oppressive confines of exchange society (Adorno & Bloch, 16), yet such a space will not be arrived at by way of the wholesale rejection of "society," but rather, through a recognition of the inherently social dimension of all philosophical activity.

Adorno's emphasis on the theoretical pole of social research does not necessitate a wholesale rejection of empirical approaches to social analysis, as Adorno offers complex models through which empirical moments are able to respond to and influence theory (Benzer, 90, 117; Oberle, 131-207). Moving against positivism, for Adorno, empirical and scientific facts are not self-evident and need to be situated within a theory of social totality (in Adorno's case, a theory of capitalist exchange society) that is able to mediate and critically decode them. Adorno provides a plethora of examples by which one is able to "philosophize" via empirical-material facts, "solving" (or interpreting) the "riddles" presented by such facts philosophically (*AP,* 127). As Adorno articulates: "the idea of science is research, that of philosophy is interpretation" (*AP,* 126); that is, "the point of interpretative philosophy is to construct keys, before which reality springs open. The old Idealism chose categories too large" (*AP,* 130).[121] Critical philosophy must present "changing trial arrangement[s], of constellation and construction," the material for which

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[120] Positioning sociology as a moment in Adorno's "changed concept of the dialectic," Rose argues that, "Adorno not only exposed antinomies in theoretical and empirical sociology but attempted himself to adumbrate a theory of the individual and social change, and to conduct empirical research" (*Melancholy,* 99). In this way, Adorno is not against empirical social research, but rather the positivist fetishism of "facts" and "objectivity." Adorno likewise dialectically opposes "pure" theory that would be devoid of any empirical-historical content.

[121] On such points Adorno's critical method is immensely indebted to Benjamin's "Epistemo-Critical Prologue," to the extent that after reading the address, Benjamin (somewhat jestingly) accuses Adorno of plagiarism, writing "I can subscribe to this proposition. Yet I could not have written it without some reference to the introduction of my book on Baroque drama" (*Adorno-Benjamin Correspondence,* 8-10).

it "burgles" from sociology, mediating such sociological "facts" in critical mosaics, while also grounding speculative philosophy in historical material categories (*AP,* 130). Within the *AP*, Adorno examines Lukács' materialist interventions upon the Kantian "thing-in-itself," which he decodes –via his own Hegelian Marxist theory of reification—as a manifestation of "the antinomies of bourgeoisie thinking" (*Consciousness,* 121-50, 110-148; Adorno*, AP*, 127-33). As Adorno continues, though "the mind (*Geist*) is…not capable of grasping the totality of the real...it may be possible to penetrate the detail, to explode in miniature the mass of merely existing reality" (*AP,* 133). Sociology provides philosophy with such details, through which it may critically explode "the real."[122]

For Adorno, sociological theory must be employed to group, or mediate, empirical phenomena in "constellations of concepts," allowing for the "ideal typical" expression of larger social relations (*ND,* 162-66). Adorno describes the impossibility of a precise designation of sociology which "cannot be defined or pinned down simply in terms of its subject matter" due to the fact that "its central concept, the concept of society, is itself not an object but a category of mediation" (*Sociology,* 103). Such statements are clearly Hegelian-Marxist: for Hegel, individual consciousness stands in a mediated relationship to the world by way of the normative life-worlds of objective "*Geist*" (*PS,* 65-66; cf. Horkheimer, *Social Science,* 4-5). While for Marx, "Capital" is not a fixed entity, but rather "the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here…the phantasmagoric form of a relation between things" (*Capital,* 165).[123] Adorno

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[122] Horkheimer (and to a more limited extent, Adorno) placed a great import on the empirical moment of social research, endeavoring to philosophize with empirical material data, and oversaw several empirical-historical research projects during his time as the director of the Institute (*Social Science,* 8-10, 14). However, many of the Frankfurt School's empirical research projects, such as "Studies on Authority and the Family," or the later "Authoritarian Personality," were far too complex and difficult to implement due to their complicated (theoretical) ambitions; they stand as "failed" studies and cast doubt on the openness of Horkheimer and Adorno to empirical research methods (Wiggershaus, 149-156). In his essay on Kracauer, Adorno describes the need to "play out" the antinomy between "theory" and "experience" "in such a way that the contrary elements interpenetrate each other" (*NL II:* 64).

[123] Rose (in *Melancholy*) notes that Adorno's relationship with Marxism is ambiguous on this point, given that Adorno has "no concept or theory of society or of a mode of production" (39), nor a theory of class or class organization (111); instead, Adorno is interested in the materialist question of "the history or formation of whatever a specific society regards as nature... what he calls second nature" (102). However, it should be underscored that Adorno is immensely sympathetic to Marx's employment of the commodity form as a theoretical explanatory key to the social totality of capitalist society, this of course following Lukács' elevation of the commodity form to the sphere of culture in his analysis of "reification."

follows Marx's fracturing of Hegelian *Geist*: human normative relationships have been replaced by the reified relations of "exchange society," or "identity thinking." Society has ceased to be a mere system of mediation; instead it has become a mythical "spell" [*Der Bann*], "a certain entwinement, which… leaves nothing out," "a totality which binds people together only by virtue of their alienation from each other" (*Sociology,* 30, 43; *ND,* 3 // 140, 159, 237, 348). Capitalist social relations appear reified as "self- evident natural laws" (Marx, *Capital,* 899, 925). For Adorno, "only theory could break the spell" (*Adorno-Benjamin Correspondence,* 282-3), that is, by presenting the historical character of mythological-natural relations, theory de-reifies the seemingly natural-objective world, revealing it as plastic with respect to human thought and action.

This sociological-philosophical perspective incorporates reflexive self-critique through which the researcher comes to understand the presence of social reality within their own seemingly "natural" faculties (*CM,* 254-5). As Adorno asserts, "The more I understand of society, the less I am able to participate in it" (*Sociology*, 3): the sociological philosopher must be motivated by an oppositional animus to the world of capitalist social relations. This engaged academic sentiment is echoed throughout Adorno's work, most succinctly in *Minima Moralia,* in which Adorno continually resists the pressures of the "wrong life" through oppositional critique: "It is part of morality not to be at home in one's home" (*MM*, 15-18, 38-40; cf. Butler, 55-61, 69-71, 94-109).

In the "Dedication" to his 1945/51 *Minima Moralia*, Adorno describes the importance of individual subjective experience in social analysis: "in an individualistic society, the general not only realizes itself through the interplay of particulars, but society is essentially the substance of the individual. For this reason, social analysis can learn incomparably more from individual experience than Hegel conceded" (*MM,* 17). Given Adorno's dialectical notion of "society"—as a diffuse organic totality instantiated out of the interplay of particular relations between "individuals"—it is evident that an analysis of "the individual,"[124] along with its pathologies, should play a substantial role in

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[124] For an analysis of Adorno's perspectives on "the individual" in relation to Foucault and Freud, see Cook, "Notes on the Individual" (61-92) in *Adorno, Foucault, and the Critique of the West* (2018). The prevalence of psychoanalytic notions within Adorno's oeuvre has been well documented: from his 1924-27 attempted habilitation under Hans Cornelius, "The Concept of the Unconscious in the Transcendental

Adorno's social analysis. Exemplary of this is Adorno's disconnected mosaic, *Minima Moralia,* in which each aphorism begins with Adorno's own subjective experiences of exile in America, which he then mediates (or "interprets") in relation to the holistic framework of capitalist social relations, utilizing his "melancholy science" to articulate the shared experience of a "damaged life" (*MM,* 15-18). In the aphorism "Tough Baby," Adorno relates his own crisis of masculinity to the objective calamity undergone by the individual under the conditions of modern labour (*MM*, 45-46). In "Do not Knock," Adorno describes his inability "to close a door quietly or discretely," which he then interprets in relation to the violent and inhuman relationships one develops to the reified objects of capitalism (*MM,* 40). The aphorism then turns to a memorable description of the "Fascist" nature of Los Angeles car culture: "which auto-driver has not felt the temptation, in the power of the motor, to run over the vermin of the street – passersby, children, bicyclists? In the movements which machines demand from their operators, lies already that which is violent, crashing, propulsively unceasing in Fascist mistreatment" (*MM,* 40).

In the tradition of theory, Adorno was a forerunner in the critical employment of Freudian psychoanalysis (beginning in the early 1930s), and one can see psychoanalytic motifs throughout virtually all of Adorno's writings.[125] As Rose argues, "[For Adorno]

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Theory of the Psyche," which would resolve the Kantian paralogism between the transcendental theory of the soul and the empirical psyche (Rose, *Melancholy,* 117; Buck-Morss, *Origins,* 17-20), through to the monumental empirical-psychoanalytic study, the *Authoritarian Personality* (1950), along with his various post-war writings on societal repression and "working through" the traumas of the past. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944)*,* specifically its considerations of Sade's Juliet and Odysseus' confrontation with the sirens, Adorno articulates the repressive character of civilization in a similar manner to the Freud of *Civilization and its Discontents,* describing the human subject as emerging through an abjection of its natural basis (*DE,* 7, 35-62). Throughout *Negative Dialectics,* in a Freudian-Nietzschean manner, Adorno describes the desire to dominate "nature" (both inner/outer) at the heart of German Idealism. Both Kant's transcendental subject and Hegel's conceptual sojourn (and its resulting encyclopedia) are driven by an unconscious desire for the control of nature, the craving to dominate, that which is un-known, or other to "spirit" (*ND,* 11 22-24, 178, 238 249, 354-358, 407; cf. Horkheimer, *Social Science,* 63-86). Finally, in *Aesthetic Theory,* Adorno continually undermines the stable Kantian subject of judgment via its pathological moments which are provided by way of Freud, examining a more complicated machinery of aesthetic experience beyond the stability of the Kantian judging subject (*AT,* 9-13).

[125] In his "Introduction to Sociology," Adorno positions Freud as a thinker of mediation, one who recognized the inherently social elements of individual cognition: "Freud came up against the fact that the innermost core on which the psychology of the single individual rests is itself something general: namely certain very general—though admittedly archaic—structures of the social context in which individuals are contained" (*Sociology,* 115). It should be noted that Adorno is highly critical of the compensatory and ideological moments of the Freudian project (Cook, *Adorno-Foucault*, 62) and seeks to politicize

Psychoanalytic theory provided the way to examine the mediation between the individual and society" and allows Adorno to explicate his "view that 'the individual is at the same time universal and particular,' without diminishing the reality of either the individual or society" (*Melancholy,* 122). Benzer goes further, arguing that psychoanalysis and sociology cannot be disentangled in Adorno, as both posit the primacy of structure over and against the subject (233). Such sentiments are echoed by Esposito: "Rather than alternative poles, the individual and society are, each, an image reflected in the other, in a regime of meaning that opposes them" (71). For Foucault, neither ethnography nor psychoanalysis are "counter-sciences" in themselves, but each domain interrupts the other, exposing each to its abyssal un-thought. Likewise, for Adorno, both psychoanalysis and sociology must be employed jointly in a critical constellation so as to contest the autarky of philosophy, while also being philosophically interrogated themselves. For Adorno, psychoanalysis becomes necessary as a counter-science precisely because the classical sociological theory (of Weber and Durkheim) failed to offer any account of the individual other than by way of Neo-Kantian notions of transcendental subjectivity, nor was it able to theorize the interpellation of the individual by way of ideology—describing how universal ideology is realized in the particular.[126]

Psychoanalysis serves two major functions in Adorno's work: firstly, it analyzes the instantiation of the universal (or societal ideology) in the particular (the individual). Secondly, psychoanalysis allows Adorno to view philosophy as dialectically entwined with the desire to dominate the natural world, recognizing Idealism's conceptual [*begrifflich*] sojourn as a "belly turned mind," a drive to "devour," dominate, and "seize" [*greifen*] all that does not conform to static categories (*ND,* 22-23; *DE,* 1-34; Cook, *Adorno-Foucault,* 64; cf. Nietzsche, *Will,* 314-9). Describing this naturalistic vision of philosophy, Cook writes, "Adorno sees reason, including its more sophisticated

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psychoanalysis against Freud's conservatism and complicity with capitalist social relations, understanding the violence of psychoanalysis as a "a faithful mirror of capitalist society" (Esposito, 71). In this way, orthodox psychoanalysis (as typified by Freud) must also be socialized and opened towards its margins by way of sociological theory, as must orthodox sociology (as typified by Weber and Durkhiem) be open to a broader understanding of the individual (and its pathologies) by way of psychoanalysis.

[126] For more on an Adornian-Hegelian critique of such neo-Kantian models of sociological research, see Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology* (33-40).

instantiations in science and philosophy, as an outgrowth of the instinctually driven struggle to survive" (*Adorno-Foucault*, 70).[127] Following the theses of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1945), "nature" has been deformed and inscribed by the "dominating character" of Western rationality and thinking reason otherwise could allow "nature" to appear and flourish materially in radically different ways.[128] It should be noted that Adorno does not advocate a dismissal of reason because of its naturalistic basis (as is claimed by Habermas[129]), but rather, a psychoanalysis of philosophy, such that it becomes aware of its problematic genesis. Following Freud, through an awareness of such pathologies one can gain a certain freedom with respect to them, and Adorno hopes

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[127] This second employment of psychoanalysis should not be seen as some crude evolutionary Darwinian naturalism, but rather, as leading the subject back to its constitutive precarity—to its "natural-historical" character. This is to say, the subject must recognize its heteronomous-autonomy with respect to the natural world: the subject is not a purely natural or biological collection of cells or instincts, nor is it a purely historical construction, but rather, the subject is constituted by a dialectic between the two domains which cannot be reduced to either pole (Cook, *Nature*, 47-60). As the situation of Odysseus in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* demonstrates, the constitution of "modern" subjectivity by way of the rejection of mythological nature dialectically carries the kernel of myth within itself, and in repressing one's own "natural elements," the subject paradoxically comes to be dominated by the ideological "second nature" of (instrumental) reason (*DE,* 36-37). As Cook stresses, following psychoanalysis, through critique and self-reflection one can "become conscious of the nature within [oneself]," allowing one a certain minimal distance and autonomy with respect to one's natural pathologies (*Nature*, 121, 107). Cook continues, drawing an affinity between critical theory and psychoanalysis: "Critical theory plumbs our natural history, examining the trends and tendencies that now undermine effective practice" (*Nature*, 132).

[128] Steven Vogel, in *Against Nature,* charts the vexing and contradictory concept of nature in Frankfurt School Critical Theory. Vogel notes that Adorno moves beyond a totalizing Lukácsian social constructivist conception of nature, presenting nature as "a great given fact, against which humans can do nothing" (68). As myth, (first) nature constantly takes revenge in the reversal of the dialectic of enlightenment. However, Vogel, following Habermas, notes the ambiguity of Adorno's naturalist-materialism, which seems to speak from an "interest" of nature which must be preserved by philosophical critique (8, 83, 3, 52, 61-7). For Vogel, such an appeal to immediate nature seemingly contradicts Adorno's Hegelian emphasis on mediation, and as such a latent naturalism seemingly to undermine one's capacities for ethical and normative judgments and claims provided by the enlightenment (69-74). For more on Adorno's ambiguous relationship to "nature" see Cook, *Adorno on Nature,* 34-61.

[129] Given that Adorno and Horkheimer seemingly posit some "authentic" conception of nature (or "mimesis")*,* which has been deformed by the progress of enlightenment, for Vogel, they implicitly undermine their own ability to make (enlightened) normative ethical claims (3, 52, 61-7), lapsing into what Habermas would term a "crypto-normativism" (Habermas, *Modernity,* 266-70 276, 284-92). The term "crypto-normativism" has been attributed to Habermas (in the *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*) apropos his criticism of Foucault (King, 288, 300-2). Broadly speaking, Habermas chastises Foucault's genealogical-historical method for its undermining of reason's ability to make meaningful normative ethical statements (266-93). Such statements are echoed in Habermas' critique of *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* though with respect to its "history of nature." For Habermas, both historical-genealogy and naturalism, pose problems for the expanded communicative notion of reason he is attempting to formulate. Vogel has aptly articulated what a Habermasian philosophy of nature, based on principles of "discourse ethics," would entail (106-70).

that through philosophical critique thought can be conducted in a less oppressive and more inclusive manner. Psychoanalysis allows Adorno to probe the genesis of both subject (history) and object (nature), examining their reciprocal entanglement, while imagining a model of philosophy which is able to encompass naturalism in a non-reductive sense. Adorno is careful to stress that thinking will always entail a certain lordship or opposition to mere nature for Kantian, normative ethical reasons, though one must continually probe the unconscious naturalistic basis of such ideals (*Moral,* 100-9).

## 2.3   The Aesthetic after the Death of Art (and Philosophy)

> "Aesthetics is not applied philosophy, but philosophy itself."
> Adorno, *AT,* 91.

The following sections will examine the central tenets of Adorno's philosophy of art—understood to encompass both the reception and production of art (or aesthetics and art) —while exploring the formal imperatives Adorno's negative dialectic presents to philosophy. Adorno's aesthetics continues his post-Idealist reflection on the Idealist-Romantic intellectual tradition: thinking through its central problematics, while continuing his overarching aim of mediating moments of the Hegelian and Kantian (aesthetic) program in constellation. For Adorno, aesthetics is not some distinct sphere of philosophy, but rather, should be understood as "philosophy itself," a fundamental space in which the meta-critical interrogation of philosophy can be conducted (*AT,* 91, 262). Such a space allows new possible relations to be imagined between philosophy and the natural world, forwarding a more sensuous, or porous model of rationality (*AT,* 64-6; Hammer, *Modernism,* 40- 44). In this way, Adorno follows Hegel in considering aesthetics as a form of thought in its own right, a provisional organization of "absolute knowing," though one which nonetheless occupies the same province as "religion and philosophy" (Hegel, *A,* 94, 100). However, Adorno contests the final Hegelian triumph of "absolute spirit" (in conceptual philosophy), fracturing Hegelian thought by those "accidental" domains (such as art-aesthetics) it has supposedly overcome (*PS,* 18).[130] For

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[130] As I will argue in the final chapter of this project (6.0), Hegel's triumph over art by philosophy (and religion) is not as straightforward as it first appears, as *Spirit'* s "accidental" and (supposedly) overcome domains continue to trouble philosophy's final absolute triumph. Further (as will be argued), Hegel's discussions of art essentially invent the discipline of art history. Though at instances Adorno strawmans

Adorno, Hegel's dream of the absolute spirit—or the world ensnared in the net of reason—has become the nightmare of instrumental rationality, dominating all particularity by way of bad abstraction. Adorno attempts to reopen the fundamental questions of philosophy by way of a conflictual dialogue between philosophy and aesthetics, in which art and aesthetics are not seen as lower spheres overcome by reason (philosophy), but as voluptuous sites from which to image a fuller, yet more sensitive and empathetic, model of rationality. The constellation of thinkers presented in this project— Adorno, Benjamin, Hegel and (to a more limited extent) Schelling—all contest what Bernstein has termed the "fate of art" in the tradition of philosophy (1-17), conceiving of art as a fundamentally philosophical space through which one is able to theorize by other means, imagining alternative, or more "reflective" relations to the world and to other disciplines. For Adorno and Benjamin in particular, art and aesthetics provide unique "prisms," through which to interrogate the historical events of their century, delivering vantages which cannot be reached by a philosophy of the concept. In conceiving the "actuality" of philosophy anew, all these thinkers employ art as an important interlocutor for philosophy.

In this way, Adorno's late *Aesthetic Theory* (1969/70) should be seen as an essentially philosophical text, continuing the project of *Negative Dialectics* (1966), which strives to elaborate new (formal) imperatives for thought in relation to the crises of the twentieth-century. Adorno's ruined and unfinished text provides the critical material through which to (re)think the relationship between aesthetics and philosophy, containing the resources for an expanded notion of reason which could also involve a divergent comportment towards the natural world (*AT*, 64-72). As will be argued throughout this chapter, Adorno does not advocate that philosophy totally give way to, or "imitate art" (*ND*,15), nor does he advocate that art should cede to philosophy or aesthetics. Instead, Adorno thinks art and philosophy in negative dialectical tension, utilizing the two domains to critically interrupt each other. Hence the full sense of the prefatory quote from Schlegel with which Adorno intended to open *Aesthetic Theory*: "what is called

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Hegel as a conceptual totalizer, his own aesthetics is immensely indebted to Hegelian notions of art and aesthetics (see, *AT*, 3).

philosophy of art usually lacks one of two things: either the philosophy or the art" (*AT,* 366). Arranged in constellation, philosophy, art, and aesthetics, are able to critically refract and supplement each other.

### 2.3.1  The Transient Possibility of Artistic Truth: *Aesthetic Theory*

"This surely means nothing less than that the foundation of art itself has been shaken, that an un-refracted [*unbrochenes*] relation to the aesthetic realm is no longer possible. The concept of a cultural resurrection after Auschwitz is illusory and absurd, and every work created since then has to pay the bitter price for this. But because the world has outlived its own downfall, it nevertheless needs art to write its unconscious history. The authentic artists of the present are those in whose works the uttermost horror still quivers."
Adorno, "Those Twenties," *CM,* 48; *Eingriffe,* 58.

Adorno's oeuvre provides a polyphony of models through which philosophy can undertake critical self-confrontation, notably: sociology, psychoanalysis, historical materialism, along with art and aesthetics (or the production and reception of art).  In this section, the critical philosophical possibilities afforded by aesthetics will be examined.[131] Much has been made of the impossible hope Adorno sees in the aesthetic dimension, which contains within it the potential to "disenchant the disenchanted world," providing a "determinate negation of determinate society" (*AT ,*58, 226). Such statements bring one to a major dilemma within Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* relating to the distinction (or lack thereof) between art and aesthetics: is Adorno providing absolute imperatives for the production of art, or is he offering aesthetic models by which to think art philosophically, or to further philosophical reflection by way of art? These reflections favour the latter course, which positions Adorno in constellation with thinkers such as Schiller, Schelling, Hegel, and Nietzsche, along with Deleuze and Lyotard, theorists for whom the aesthetic dimension contains new models of judgment and modes of philosophy more broadly, safeguarding the possibility of logics other than those provided by conceptual discursive cognition.[132] Both Adorno and Benjamin collapse the hard distinction between art and

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[131] In the draft version of the proposed "Introduction" to *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno describes how aesthetics "presents philosophy the bill," forcing it to engage in self-reflection: "Aesthetics presents philosophy with the bill for the fact that the academic system degraded it to being a mere specialization. It demands of philosophy precisely what philosophy has neglected to do: that it extract phenomenon from their existence and bring them to self-reflection; this would be the reflection of what is petrified in the sciences, not a specialized science located beyond them" (*AT,* 262).

[132] For more on Adorno's notion of "aesthetic experience," particularly in relation to Hölderlin, Schiller, Schlegel, and post-Kantian Aesthetics, see Nathan Ross, *The Philosophy and Politics of Aesthetic Experience* (193-245).

aesthetics, or artistic works and commentary on them, seeing works and their critical reception-supplementation as fundamentally linked. Aesthetics should be seen in conjunction with Adorno's other contestatory domains (sociology and psychoanalysis), spheres which emphasize the historical-material finitude of knowledge. Aesthetics likewise challenges the autarky of philosophy, while imagining alternative relationships with the natural world (more about which will be said in Ch. 6).

To follow Bernstein (in his 1992 *The Fate of Art*), Adorno should be seen as a "post-aesthetic" thinker who sought to mend "the discordance of art and truth" (5, 1), one who sought to overcome the exclusion of aesthetic considerations from the proper philosophical domains of "truth" and morality, a scene as old as philosophy itself, beginning with Plato's expulsion of the poets.[133] In striving to overcome this "aesthetic alienation," Adorno positions aesthetics in conflict with traditional philosophical domains, provoking reflection within such spheres, while questioning the (co)constitutive relationship between philosophy and aesthetics more broadly. Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory,* "seeks to trace the critical transformation that aesthetic discourse performs upon the language of reason," and it is "through such a reflection" that one can "comprehend how art's apparent unreason reveals the irrationality of formal, enlightened reason" (Bernstein, *Fate,* 15). For Adorno, aesthetics demonstrates the philosophical possibility of the "redemption of semblance [or illusion]" (*AT,* 107), that is, the inclusion of downcast (or "non-identical") domains beyond conceptual discursive "identity thinking" within philosophical reflection (*ND,* 4-7, 11).[134] Aesthetics grasps the possibility of a "truth of sensuous particularity, and not the subsumption of one thing in the metaphysical hierarchy" (Bernstein, *Fate,* 2). That is, aesthetics recognizes that truth claims could issue from domains—such as art, religion or nature—spheres often thought to be overcome by conceptual philosophy. However, aesthetics does not grasp such sensuousness by fetishizing some immediate "sense certainty," or pure experience, but rather, in a mediated context in which first nature no longer exists, aesthetics refracts an image of

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[133] See, Plato, *The Republic,* Books 3 &10 (66-102, 297-312).

[134] As Bernstein writes, "[for Adorno the] experience of modern art is the suspension of identity thinking." (*Fate of Art,* 189). The Idea of Aesthetics as the "redemption of illusion" is central to Lambert Zuidervaart's influential 1993 text, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory: The Redemption of Illusion* (see, 178-213).

repressed "first nature" through the realm of convention or historical "second nature." Describing such a prismatic perspective, Adorno writes: "Art is the rescue of nature—or of immediacy—through its negation, that is, total mediation. It makes itself like what is free of domination by the limitless domination over its material" (*AT,* 288; Paddison, 58). In playing at, or seeming like nature, art presents a dialectically refracted image of first nature from within second nature, inviting one to consider the extent to which "nature" is always already mediated, yet also how one might deal with the natural world in a less dominating fashion. Pushed further, for Adorno, all interrogations of aesthetics can be seen as inquiries into mediation: a questioning of the extent to which seemingly natural (aesthetic) objects contain a social-historical index (Paddison, 101). Adorno also repeatedly upholds the production of art as a utopian model of "social labour," elucidating a more caring relationship to the domain of objects and the natural world (*AT,* 42,167, 224, 236).[135]

With respect to the conflict between faculties, for Adorno, art provides a critical site in which philosophy is able to reflect upon itself—considering both its form and content—while becoming the more indirect practice of "criticism," through which philosophy is able to encounter alterity without lapsing into irrational caprice. Describing this capacity of art in *Aesthetic Theory,* Adorno writes:

> Art is rationality that criticizes rationality without withdrawing from it; art is not something pre-rational or irrational which would peremptorily condemn it as untruth in the face of the entanglement of all human activity in the social totality. Rational and irrational theories of art are therefore equally faulty. (*AT,* 55)

After the disaster, poetry (and art more generally) is not only possible, but in fact necessary, given that aesthetics provides a rational critique of the instrumental rationality of late capitalist society, oppressive logics which directly contributed to such crises. By providing a "running commentary on reason," art and aesthetics demonstrate the

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[135] Describing art as a utopian form of practice, Adorno writes: "Only artworks that are to be sensed as a form of comportment have a *raison d'etre*. Art is not only the plenipotentiary of a better praxis than that which has to date predominated, but is equally the critique of praxis as the rule of brutal self-preservation at the heart of the status quo and in its service. It gives the lie to production for production's sake and opts for a form of praxis beyond the spell of labour. Art's *promesse du Bonheur* means not only that hitherto praxis has blocked happiness but that happiness is beyond praxis. The measure of the chasm separating praxis from happiness is taken by the force of the negativity of the art work" (*AT,* 12).

possibility of a fuller model of rationality, one more attuned to the plethora of possible experiences and the complexities of the (natural) world (Hammer, *Modernism,* 44). Aesthetic objects serve as "prisms" that refract existing reality, and when mediated through aesthetic reflection, kaleidoscopically demonstrate the possibility that reality could be thought and constructed otherwise.

The enigmatic notion of "truth-content" [*Wahrheitsgehalt*] allows Adorno to thematize the "non-identical" relationship between art and philosophy that arises via aesthetic reflection (*Noten,* 14).[136] Following Adorno's writings on music, the truth content of the work of art can be understood in terms of the dialectic between "the composer" (or the creative subject) and the "musical-artistic material" (*New Music,* 31-34; *Sociology of Music,* 213-8; *GS 7:* 45). The latter pole describes the natural-historical character of the "raw-material" of music, recognizing that what is seemingly "natural" in music is a historical accomplishment of the tradition, a cipher to the historical labour of composition (Geuss, 118-9; Paddison, 110- 111). Works of art should be understood as situated natural-historical "solutions to problems" (*Sociology of Music,* 213-5), that is, as formal configurations of the materials and technologies of a given epoch (Robinson, 186-93; *AT,* 43-44). The "truth-content" of the work is the solution to the historical demands of the natural material synthesized within the individual work: "the interaction of the socially mediated expressive subject with the objectivity of the historically mediated musical material, as realized in the concrete structure of particular musical works" (Paddison, 111; *AT,* 44 128-129, 191, 284). Particular works of art enact an experimental natural-historical crystallization of subject and object, both of which are revealed to be mediated by their (non) identity-in-difference, recognizing that there is no pure "natural" artist independent of their presence within historical forms, and that there exists no purely historical work independent of its particular actualizations.

The truth-content of the work, or its specific natural-historical configuration, can only be grasped on the level of form via an immanent critical supplementation. For Adorno, it is on the level of form that the artist's particular response to the demands of

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[136] Adorno refashions this formulation from Benjamin, which will be explored in greater depth in 4.1.3. For more on "truth content" in Adorno's work see Zuidervaart (xxii-xxiv, 32, 38-43, 192-203, 296-98); Bernstein, *Fate* (244-61); Hullot-Kentor (83-84, 91).

the aesthetic material is crystalized, and the critic must unfold these historically sedimented dimensions of meaning within the object, refusing to locate meaning in authorial intention, or subjective agency. Because of Adorno's opening of "natural" aesthetic notions to history, seemingly natural or arbitrary formal aesthetic choices become historicized and politicized and one can read the presence of "society" in the very "texture" of art (*Sociology of Music,* 218). For example, in his 1940 *Philosophy of New Music*, Adorno will assert the "progressive" (27-99; Paddison, 98) character of Schoenberg's a-tonal experimentations, given their innovative response to the natural-historical demands of the musical material, while Stravinsky (despite his "modern" veneer) represents a regression to an un-dialectical folk-like immediacy (*New Music,* 8-10, 105-110, 155-8; Buck Morss, *Origin,* 37-42). Similarly, Adorno demystifies stereotypes of Beethoven as some subjective "genius," instead positioning him as immanently working through handed down artistic forms, as one who exhibited an acute awareness of the importance of tradition (*Sociology of Music*, 209-223; *Beethoveen,*152-3, 59, 102-5). For Adorno, an artwork is "political" not to the extent that it deals with politics on the level of content, but rather, to the degree that it responds formally to the demands set forth by the material, which are given over to it by way of tradition. Adorno rejects explicitly political or "committed" forms of art that do not embody politics on the level of form: despite their avowed political content, such works refuse to acknowledge the entanglement of  aesthetic material and history, thus regress to an un-dialectical immediacy.[137] For Adorno, within the modern context of mechanical reproduction,

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[137] For Adorno, "committed" art degrades art to mere propaganda and denies the thought-provoking critical supplementary element of the work: "commitment often means bleating what everyone is already saying or at least secretly wants to hear" (*NL II:* 93). Stressing the movement of politics from committed-political art to autonomous art Adorno will write: "This is not a time for political works of art, but politics has migrated to autonomous works, and nowhere more so than where these seem politically dead" (*NL II:* 93-4). Adorno further describes the uniquely political potential of the autonomous work of art: "It is not the office of art to spotlight alternatives, but to resist by its form alone the course of the world, which permanently puts a pistol to men's heads. In fact, as soon as committed works of art do instigate decisions at their own level, the decisions become interchangeable" (*NL II:* 81; see further, Paddison, 81). For more on Adorno's notion of political art, see his 1962 essay "Commitment." Huysen, in "Adorno in Reverse: From Hollywood to Richard Wagner," positions Adorno's aesthetic (Modernist) notions of the autonomy of art in relation to the explicitly political avant-garde, and the culture industry, all of which are taken as ideal typical categories. As Huysen continually asserts, modernism and mass culture are dialectically entwined in their constant desire to define themselves in opposition to each other (16-17). Thus, both in Adorno's corpus, and in

politics has been exiled to the autonomous (or high modernist) work of art, which through its formal emphasis on its fragmentary and incomplete nature, monadologically mirrors the fragmented nature of society: "the unsolved antagonisms of reality return as problems of form" (*AT,* 6). Despite its seeming autonomy from society, the autonomous work of art presents a monadological mirror to society due to the natural-historical character of each: both entail processes of labour upon handed down natural-historical forms, or what Adorno terms "artistic material" (*New Music,* 31-35; Paddison, 98).[138]

Given the coded character of the truth-content of the work of art, a new importance is placed upon the practice of criticism as a means to unpack the historical dimensions latent in "natural" aesthetic material. Describing the importance of aesthetics as a mechanism to unfold the work of art through critical interpretation, Adorno will write:

> The truth content of artworks is the objective solution of the enigma posed by each and everyone. By demanding its solution, the enigma points to its truth content. It can only be achieved through philosophical reflection…. Artworks, especially those of the highest dignity, await their interpretation. (*AT,* 128)

Truth content involves such an "interpretation" of the relation of aesthetic objects to their natural-historical conditions of possibility. By decoding the "demands of the material" within the particular "artwork," alongside the author's situated response to such demands, the critic presents the work "in truth," that is, in relation to the broader historical unfolding of art, and the situated debates of its time (*New Music,* 31-34). This hermeneutical procedure of the continual supplemental "interpretation" of the aesthetic object provides a model for how philosophy might comport itself to the world in a more inclusive sense, considering the natural-historical dimensions of the domain of objects more broadly. Further, through continual critical immersion in works of art, philosophy is

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cultural analysis more generally, one would do well to understand the reciprocal entanglement of both modernist high art and the lower art of the culture industry—neither can exist without the other.

[138] In a manner reminiscent of Benjamin, Adorno describes the mortuary moment of "truth-content," in which the truth of a work becomes more evident via historical decay, as Adorno writes: "the merits of a work, its level of form, its inner coherence, generally become recognizable only when the material becomes outdated or when the sensorium becomes deadened to the most conspicuous features of the façade...For quality to unfold historically, it is not quality alone that is required in itself, but also what comes afterward and sets the older work in relief; perhaps there is even a relationship between quality and the process of dying off" (*AT,* 195).

able to train itself in a new, more sensitive and mimetic logic of the concept, one based on the primacy of reflective understandings of judgment.[139]

Adorno stresses the potential for aesthetics to interrupt unreflective catharsis within the "constitutive subject" of philosophy by distorting the Kantian relationship between the aesthetic object and the "disinterested spectator" (or the "subject-object" model of cognition and aesthetic judgment). As opposed to the Kantian mechanism of aesthetic judgment in which the artistic object "drops-out," and aesthetics becomes a mere occasion for the judgment of the subject, for Adorno (following post-Kantian Idealism), the (aesthetic) object contains a dynamism which provokes further reflection, allowing for a plethora of speculative-experimental relations between the mind and world. Thus, the true "political" upshot of art and aesthetics lies not in its endorsement of some particular program (or some "content"), but rather, in its ability to provoke reflection on the level of form, shattering quotidian assumptions, provoking one to question the "distributions of the sensible" that one exists within (cf. Rancière, [134-68]). In this manner Adorno prefers the response of aesthetic modernism as opposed to "committed" or political art. Modernism commences with a questioning of art's formal mechanisms and their adequacy in the face of given reality: it provokes reflection without lapsing into mere propaganda, or unreflectively upholding the status quo as do the works of the "culture industry" (*DE,* 94-136).[140]

For Adorno, the "authentic" work of art does not provide a catharsis that can be recuperated by way of determinate categories (the work cannot be finally "understood"),

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[139] In *Negative Dialectics,* Adorno describes a possible reconciliation between aesthetics and philosophy by way of the incorporation of mimetic aesthetic moments into conceptual thought. As Adorno writes, "to represent the mimesis it supplanted, the concept has no other way than to adopt something mimetic in its own comportment. The aesthetic moment is thus not accidental to philosophy…but it is no less incumbent on philosophy to avoid its aestheticism, to sublimate the aesthetic into the real, by cogent insights. Cogency and play are the two poles of philosophy. [Philosophy's] affinity to art does not entitle it to borrow from art…What the philosophical concept will not abandon is the longing that animates the non-conceptual side of art, and whose fulfillment shuns the immediate side of art as mere appearance" (*ND,* 15).

[140] By "committed art," Adorno broadly glosses both Sartre's notion of "*littérature engagée"* (in *What is Literature?)* and later Lukácsian socialist realism. Adorno is unique (as a political thinker) in siding with autonomous art—or works which stage politics on the level of form—against political art which attempts to thematize politics as the content of art. For more on Adorno's aesthetic critique of Sartre, see Sherman, 75-8.

but rather, it provokes a "shudder" [*Erschütterung*] or a fracturing of such stable notions.

As Adorno writes in *Aesthetic Theory*:

> The shock aroused by important works is not employed to trigger personal, otherwise repressed emotions. Rather, this shock is the moment in which recipients forget themselves and disappear into the work; it is the moment of being shaken. The recipients lose their footing [*Er verliert den Boden unter den Füßen*]; the possibility of truth, embodied in the aesthetic image, becomes tangible. This immediacy, in the fullest sense, of relation to artworks is a function of mediation, of penetrating and encompassing experience [*Erfahrung*]; it takes shape in the fraction of an instant, and for this the whole of consciousness is required, not isolated stimuli and responses. The experience of art as that of its truth or untruth is more than subjective experience: It is the irruption of objectivity into subjective consciousness ...Shudder, radically opposed to the conventional idea of experience [*Erlebnis*] provides no particular satisfaction for the I; it bears no similarity to desire. Rather, it is a memento of the liquidation of the I, which, shaken, perceives its own limitedness and finitude. (*AT,* 245; *GS 7.* 363: 4320-1)[141]

The upshot of truly critical works of art lies not in their conformity to established categories, nor in their determination by the judgment of subjects, but rather, in their destructive ability to shatter such suppositions, provoking a sublime "shudder" which leads the subject back to its constitutive finitude. For Adorno, great works offer the possibility of a transformative "metaphysical experience" [*geistige Erfahrung*], as opposed to the "conventional idea of experience" [*Erlebnis*]: that is, experiences which gesture towards the possibility of a new model of judgment which strives to "use the concept in order to reach beyond the concept" (*Lectures ND,* 95; *GS 7:* 33, 393; cf. Bernstein, *Fate,* 195-7). For Adorno, philosophy must follow art, while not wholly reducing itself to it (*ND,* 15). After Auschwitz, philosophy cannot venture to be a conventionally systematic or discursive endeavor, but must attempt to refract historical crises on the level of form: philosophy must "think in fragments [*in Brüchen*], just as reality is fragmentary [*Brüchig*]" it must "find its unity in and through the breaks and not

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[141] The relationship between Adorno's notion of the "shudder" and the Kantian sublime is highly evident. However, for Kant, though one perceives one's "limitedness and finitude" in the face of sublime objects, ultimately reason (and the stability of the subject) intervenes, bringing the subject back to itself. Whereas for Adorno, no such solace is afforded, as the subject is perpetually shattered and ungrounded. As Bernstein writes, "Shudder is the memorial experience of nature's transcendence, its non-identity and sublimity" (220, cf. 220-4). For Adorno, such a "shuddering" before nature is akin to a recognition of one's constitutive non-identity before the world—that the world is always in excess of whatever concept one may have of it—as Adorno will stress, "Consciousness without Shudder is reified..." (*AT,* 331). More will be said regarding the sublime, and the redemption of a minimal possibility of transcendence, in the final chapter of this project where I take up Adorno's notion of "natural-beauty" (6.2.3.1).

by glossing them over" (*NL I:*16; *Noten,* 19; cf. *ND,* 40). Philosophy should not commence with the stable, grounded subject, but rather, with one which has been "shuddered," one who has had the experience [*Erfahrung*] of "the liquidation of the I"— of the loss of its ground.

Thought in Kantian terms, Adorno's gestures involve the importation of the logic of aesthetics— "reflective judgment" from the *Critique of Judgment*—into that of cognition (*Critique of Pure Reason*), moving against categorical "determinate judgment," in which the categories (or rules) are known in advance and are merely schematized with respect to a given sensation.[142] Instead, "reflective judgment," as employed in judgments of beauty and sublimity, proceeds without a preordained rule that it immanently attempts to fashion by speaking in a "universal voice" (*CPJ,* 15-20; 99-101). As Arendt has noted, such a Kantian "*Sensus Communis*" provides a new model of political judgment which could usher in a more egalitarian "cosmopolitan" order of things, wherein the philosopher endeavors to theorize as a "world spectator" (*Lectures Kant,* 67, 70, 72-5). While for Bernstein, what is important is the existential fragility of such judgments: in their precarity and fragmented state, they display an openness towards community, perpetually reminding one that the subject and its categories are "not all" (*Fate,* 44-58; cf. Adorno, *Metaphysics,* 144). Thought together with philosophy, aesthetics is able to open the project of reason in more empathetic directions, demonstrating the existence of alternative logics beyond conceptual discursive cognition (more about which will be said in Ch. 6.).

Adorno postulates that through the production and reception of art one can see something of this revised conception of philosophy, "I believe that this procedure, which the examination of works of art suggests to us, must in a certain sense be prototypical for

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[142] As Bernstein emphasizes, Kant's *CPJ* has particular import for the continental tradition: though Kant seemingly repeats the Platonic gesture of banishing art from considerations of truth (in the *CPR)*, in the *CPJ* Kant seeks to "mend the divide" (7), demonstrating how (aesthetic) judgment can provide a reconciliation of the old divisions of knowledge—for Kant, the knowledge of nature with the possibility of freedom and ethics. In the continental tradition, art and aesthetic judgment provide a means of overcoming subjective alienation, "(re) connecting the modern subject or self with an order beyond it," while further providing subjects with "another discourse, another metaphysics," in which "a secular world [is] empowered as a source of meaning beyond the self or subject (8-9)." For more on the importance of the Kantian aesthetic in developing new models of philosophy, see Bernstein "Memorial Aesthetics" in *The Fate of Art* (17-63).

cognition in general, for the cognition of reality" (*Lectures ND,* 84). Art, along with the more general rubric of "aesthetic experience," provides essential guides for the formation of new philosophical logics: containing the ability to "represent something like a positive infinity" (*Lectures ND,* 84). However, Adorno is careful to note that philosophy should not simply give way to or become art; what is needed is a productive exchange (or conflict) between the aesthetic and the philosophical domains (*ND,* 15).

What art and philosophy both share is a reliance on traditional natural-historical forms, which they can strive to treat in more inclusive ways. Describing this convergence, Adorno will write, "what art and philosophy have in common is not the form or the shaping process, but an attitude that prohibits pseudo-morphisms" (*Lectures ND,* 188). This is, both domains must take care not to "over-name," creating neologism or unnecessarily novel concepts (Benjamin, *OT,* 14), without first critically working through the natural history of handed down forms, or the "artistic material" (*New Music,* 31-34). At the end of his *Lectures on Negative Dialectics,* Adorno gestures toward a new art of the concept which could be founded on "the relation of labour to its material," which would potentially allow philosophy to "transcend the concept through the concept itself" (*Lectures ND,* 188, 191). Working critically within the immanent continuum of handed down natural-historical forms, philosophy must strive to compose itself in novel ways from within the tradition.

Such a new logic of the concept has the potential to unlock the "object" of inquiry in startling new ways, as when arranged in constellation the mimetic and expressive dimensions of objects (and language) are able to emerge. Describing the emergence of mimesis by way of conceptual constellations, Adorno will write:

> To represent the thing it has repressed, namely mimesis, the concept has no alternative but to incorporate some of it into its own behaviour. In accordance with the criteria of the concept, this procedure introduces an element of playfulness. This means that the aesthetic aspect is not a contingent component of philosophy. (*Lectures ND,* 187; cf. *ND,* 15)[143]

In order to unlock the mimetic dimensions of thought, philosophy must incorporate a "playfulness" into its practices, whereby philosophy ceases to be an exercise of

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[143]Adorno's notion of mimesis is indebted to Benjamin's philosophical anthropological "mimetic faculty" which will be discussed in more depth in 3.3.3. For more on the (slight) divergence between the two thinkers apropos mimesis, see Jay, *Experience* (328-9, 338, 341, 348, 356-7).

determinate conceptual cognition and becomes more of a "play of seeming" to follow Schiller (Adorno, *Metaphysics*, 114; Ross, 46-47). Philosophy must step away from the "seriousness" of conceptual thought:

> philosophy contains a playful element which the traditional view of it as a science would like to exorcise...The un-naïve thinker knows how far he remains from the object of his thinking...He must not deny his clownish traits, least of all since they alone can give him hope for what is denied him. Philosophy is the most serious of things, but then again it is not that serious. (*ND,* 14)

Philosophy must secede its ground to the subaltern logics contained in art and aesthetics, attaining identity in difference by way of logics other to the concept (*ND,* 15). Thought must "redeem illusion," that is, it must allow particular moments to emerge for themselves, as singular differences, before attempting to subsume them under some conceptual rubric. Philosophy must also follow after the Nietzschean "genius of construction": the philosopher-artist, who thinks poetically and recognizes the historical "origin" of all thought, responding playfully and constructively ("Truth and Lie," 42).

For Adorno, philosophy (following aesthetics) cannot commence with an appeal to some purity of origin, nor to some a-historical table of categories; instead, it must originate with a "shudder," with a gesture of self-fracturing that emphasizes its own precarity and analytic of finitude. Philosophy must begin with the "essay(er)," in an attempt to articulate and embody both the fragile character of its object of inquiry, while recognizing the inherent instability of its form. Philosophy initiates with a sovereign act of construction atop what Schelling termed the "*Ungrund*" subtending every representation (*FE,* 66-70). It is such a metaphysic, along with the tenuous philosophical constructions erected atop it, that should be seen as informing Adorno's 1960-6 negative dialectic.

Through the critical constellation of philosophy with other disciplines, Adorno contests the autarky of *Spirit,* while continuing the Idealist program of opening reason to a broader array of experiences. By thinking philosophy in terms of "conflict" as opposed to stasis, Adorno provides a negative encyclopedia for the organization of knowledge, or a system of knowledge which prioritizes the accident or "non-identity" over unity and "identity." Adorno's fracturing of philosophy by way of the aesthetic allows philosophy

to open itself to its "natural historical" basis, elaborating a more open form of rationality, along with novel formal imperatives of the practice of philosophy.

# Part 2: Benjamin

"To cultivate fields where, until now, only madness has reigned. Forge ahead with the wetted axe of reason, looking neither right nor left so as not to succumb to the horror that beckons from deep in the primeval forest. Every ground must at some point be made arable by reason, must have been cleared of the undergrowth of delusion and myth." Benjamin, *The Arcades Project,* [N1-4], 456-7.

Part two of this dissertation focuses on the early writings of Walter Benjamin (~1916-1928) in order to outline his "coming philosophy," or his expanded philosophy of experience [*Erfahrung*]. Such an understanding of philosophy opens reason to a polyphony of new domains (or experiences), while nonetheless remaining systematic, a possibility allowed by Benjamin's novel conception of language. This desire to renew philosophy by way of experience led Benjamin first to the transcendental program of Kant and later to German Romantic-Idealists such as the *Frühromantiker,* Goethe, and finally, to the allegories of the Baroque and Modernity. His early work on Kant sought to immanently refashion the transcendental by way of language and experience, while his "Romantic-Idealist"[144] work sought to intervene upon Kant's negative understanding of critique, while undertaking a further troubling of philosophy by way of the metaphysical "tangle" that is nature. In this way, Benjamin's early working through of the Kantian program is eminently post-Idealist, given his commitment to meta-critically refashioning the lexicons of both Kant and Romantic-Idealism in the development of his own coming philosophy. Further, as will be argued throughout both chapters, Benjamin's philosophy as a whole seeks to move beyond conventional notions of the philosophical subject, examining dynamic interrelations between subject and object, and, particularly in his darker Romantic-Idealist works, eviscerating the subject entirely. Even Benjamin's early meta-critique of the Kantian program is radically experimental, invading the Kantian transcendental by way of experience in a manner akin to Deleuze. In this manner, Benjamin's work should be seen as inhabiting the Idealist-Romantic space of concerns and "micrologically" (*OT,* 3) rehearsing the movement beyond Kant, by way of an

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[144] Following Rajan, I see Benjamin's work as continuing in the Idealist-Romantic encyclopedic tradition, in which the encyclopedia is fractured by way of its particular moments, allowing thought to reflect upon itself, while considering the question of system experimentally ("Encyclopedia," 341). Further, it should be emphasized, again following Rajan, that Romanticism and Idealism be seen in a permeable relationship, in which Romanticism forms the broader fold within which Idealist philosophy takes place ("Encyclopedia," 333). In such a manner, Benjamin's work can be seen as developing a darker romantic metaphysics in line with thinkers such as Nietzsche, Lukács and Schelling.

experimental reworking of Kantian terminology, performed by the post-Kantian Idealist-Romantics, notably Hamann, the Schlegels, Novalis, Goethe, Schelling and Hegel. Reading Benjamin in constellation with these thinkers allows the metaphysical tenets of his work to emerge, along with the outlines of his transcendental philosophy of experience.

Textually, these two chapters primarily take up the early writings of Benjamin (to approximately 1928): beginning with his 1916 "On Language as Such and the Language of Man" and his 1918 "Program for a Coming Philosophy," through to his 1925/8 *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*. This mosaic of texts will be read as Benjamin's attempt to formulate an expanded philosophy of "experience" (Ch. 3), along with the development of his metaphysical "mortuary romantic" understanding of philosophy as a practice of criticism (Ch. 4). Though I draw from Benjamin's wider corpus, it is these early texts which crystalize the prosaic kernel of Benjamin's "coming philosophy" most distinctly.[145] Originally, Benjamin intended to elaborate his philosophy for the future by extending and opening the (neo) Kantian transcendental to a broader array of "experiences," such as, history, art, and language (*SW 1:* 100-10). This expansion was made possible by Benjamin's novel conception of language, which allowed language to be seen as a transcendental-systematic condition for a diversity of experiences. However, while conducting provisional research for his dissertation—which would attempt to articulate a notion of "historical experience" by way of Kant—Benjamin became dissatisfied with the Kantian "subjective Idealist" program, and thus entered the *Frühromantik "*absolute Idealist" sphere of concerns with his 1919-20 dissertation "On the Concept of Art Criticism in German Romanticism," along with his related study on

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[145] Perhaps due to his aversion to "neologisms" (*OT*, 14), methodological statements are sparse throughout Benjamin's oeuvre. The majority of Benjamin's texts do not arise *ex nihilo*, but rather, subsist as commentary upon another text or author: such as N. Leskov providing the conditions for Benjamin's reflections of "storytelling," Baudelaire for an interrogation of Modernity and translation, and Eduard Fuchs for Benjamin's reflections on historicism. Despite this, Benjamin does have several "methodological" texts, which, if read in constellation, can illustrate a unified philosophy. These are "On Language as Such and the Language of Man" (1916), "On the Program for the Coming Philosophy" (1918), "The Task of the Translator" (1921/3), "Epistemo-Crtical Prologue" in *The Origin of the German Trauerspiel* (1925/8), "Convolute N" of the *Arcades Project*, and "Theses on the Concept of History" (1940). These texts can be read as "meta-critical" commentaries and elucidations of Benjamin's own historical-critical philosophy.

Goethe ("Goethe's *Elective Affinities*," 1919-22/1924-5), and his *Habilitation* on the Baroque *Trauerspiel*. Seen in constellation, Benjamin's early writings recapitulate the meta-critical extension of the Kantian program, via Kant's own aporias and concepts, undertaken by many in the Idealist-Romantic generation.

# 3     *Benjamin's Systematic Intentions: Towards a Transcendental Philosophy of Experience*

## 3.1    A Transcendental Philosophy of Experience

> "Of all philosophers, Kant is the one who discovers the prodigious domain of the transcendental. He is the analogue of a great explorer—not of another world, but of the upper and lower reaches of this one."
>
> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition,* 136, cf. 176.

This chapter will map the promissory notion of "system" in Benjamin's early writings (1916-21), considering both its experiential and transcendental poles. It will be argued that Benjamin's early work develops a transcendental philosophy of experience structured by a unique understanding of language and its mimetic dimensions. Such an early taxonomy for philosophy is retranslated into a more expansive "mortuary" model of philosophy as criticism, as Benjamin developed intellectually and sought to meta-critically move beyond the confines of the Kantian program. The contours of such a philosophy, as it is articulated in Benjamin's dissertation on the *Frühromantik* concept of art criticism, his essay on Goethe's *Elective Affinities,* along with the study of Baroque *Trauerspiel,* will be articulated in the next chapter (Ch. 4).

Following a brief critical biographical panorama, this chapter commences by glossing Benjamin's essayistic "program" for a new understanding of philosophy, reading his 1918 text, "On the Program for a Coming Philosophy." Within the text, Benjamin presents the task for a philosophy of the future: the articulation of an expanded conception of experience [*Erfahrung*] in a systematic manner, a task Benjamin sought to undertake via an extension of the Kantian program into the domain of language (*GS II*: 158). In order to articulate Benjamin's "coming philosophy" this chapter presents the antinomy between "experience" and "system" (understood as language or the transcendental) as it appears in Benjamin. Reference will be made primarily to Benjamin's early writings (to 1921) to describe his "coming philosophy" and philosophy of language; however, to comprehend his philosophy of experience one must draw from his writings on Modernity from the 1930s.

To convey Benjamin's polyvalent understanding of "experience," I will draw from several of his avant-garde texts, which can be read as latently articulating his natural-historical model of perception. In such a model, authentic "experience"

[*Erfahrung*][146] comes to be understood as a historically attuned awareness of the "media"—or systems of mediation such as technology and language—that one exists within. Following Caygill, experience can be understood as the motor of Benjamin's thought, a nebulous flow that always already exceeds the bounds of the concept, acting as a transient "real" against which philosophy must continually (re)evaluate and (re)orient itself (xii-xiii).[147] However, despite this primacy conferred to experience, Benjamin's thought should be distinguished from both phenomenology and vitalist philosophies of life (or *Lebensphilsophie*), primarily due to the central role Benjamin accords to language.[148] For this reason, I will examine Benjamin's early writings on language— particularly his "On Language as Such and the Language of Man" (1916) along with the "Task of the Translator" (1923)— which present a mimetic understanding of language able to transcribe experience into a malleable, though nonetheless transcendental, structure.

This invasion of philosophy by experience can be glossed in terms of Schelling's "asystasy." Schelling, in his "On the Nature of Philosophy as Science" (1821), takes up the question of system in terms of "asystasy" (210-1): the "inner conflict" driving

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[146] *Erfahrung,* in German connotes a more durational form of experience, in which one is said to have "had an experience," that is, to locate a particular event within a larger narrative, context, or story. This is opposed to the more immediate *Erlebnis*: instant experiences of life that one has on a daily basis.

[147] For Caygill, Benjamin is a thinker who attempts to create a transcendental yet speculative model of philosophy, one which commences with and extents the Kantian understanding of experience. As Caygill writes: "Benjamin…attempts to extend the concept of experience bequeathed by Kant by transforming it into an anti-Hegelian but nevertheless speculative philosophy of history inspired by a Nietzschean active nihilism" (xii). Such a deconstructed Kantianism, infused with a Nietschean historical sentiment, allows for the possibility of a "discontinuous experience of the absolute" (xii), in which philosophy is able to encounter domains beyond the usual purview of the concept without lapsing into an uncritical irrationalism. Caygill is correct to stress the primacy of experience in Benjamin's thought, though I depart with him with his gloss of Benjamin as "anti-Hegelian"; instead, I position Benjamin as operating within the Idealist-Romantic field of concerns. Further, as will be argued in this chapter, Caygill goes too far in his subsumption of Benjamin's thinking on language into a mere moment within a broader transcendental philosophy of experience; instead, as will be argued in the final section, it is precisely Benjamin's novel understanding of language which acts as the transcendental condition for his expanded philosophy of experience.

[148] Benjamin differentiates his later historiographical "dialectic images" from a phenomenology experience by way of the critical importance of language (*Arcades,* [N3,1] 462-3). Despite Benjamin's ongoing polemic against Heidegger (*BC, 82,* 168, 172, 359-60, 365), the two thinkers arrive at similar insights regarding language, a connection about which more deserves to be said. Benjamin was drawn to certain vitalist philosophies of life such as the German Youth movement (specifically their metaphysical notion of "youth"), though from an early age he was skeptical of their wholesale abandonment of critical philosophy, along with their mythological lapse into irrationalism and nationalism (during WWI).

knowledge, a maelstrom out of which the need for system arises: "The need for harmony arises first of all in disharmony" (210; cf. "Criticism & Dogmatism,"163-77). By recognizing "asystasy," "a kind of a-systematicity, or resistance to system," as the "condition of possibility" for the "life of systems" (Rajan, "Encyclopedia," 348, 341; "Excitability," 312), Schelling allows "system" to be theorized in a dynamic and expanded sense, in a manner which risks itself in relation to its object. Likewise, Benjamin's early "system," grounded upon his philosophy of language, allows the dynamic asystasy of experience to enter into philosophy, troubling thought, while nonetheless moving it forward. The particular "accident," event, or experience is allowed to annex and influence philosophy.

Benjamin opposes the "*more gemetrico*" (*OT,* 1), or the dogmatic veneration of methodological clarity in philosophy, operating instead in a "left-handed" or indirect manner which posits criticism as first philosophy (*SW* 1: 447). However, as Missac is careful to note, the replacement of philosophy by criticism does not commit Benjamin to a wholesale rejection of the systematic possibility of philosophy; instead, Benjamin deconstructs the naïve binary between "systematic" and "anti-systematic," and should be considered an "anti-systematic thinker, who nevertheless sometimes experienced the need to cast anchor" (21). Criticism as first philosophy commences by denying philosophy the possibility of creation ex *nihilo*: thought does not commence "neologistically" (*OT,* 14-15), but rather, with a gesture of deferral, a ceding of its stable ground and a recognition of its perpetual lateness. Such an indirect understanding of philosophy as criticism allows thought to become open to new cross-disciplinary and non-philosophical constellations, considering other logics, or "*-abilities*," such as experience, translation, mediation, and language (Weber, 4).

Benjamin provides a unique post-Idealist model of philosophy: one which does not reduce all experience to a static table of categories (as Kant does), nor does it lapse into some uncritical phenomenological immediacy or vital *Lebensphilosophie*. By intervening upon the Kantian architectonic in terms of both experience and language, Benjamin is able to articulate a transcendental philosophy of experience that allows for

new mimetic encounters with domains such as nature, history and mythology.[149] It is this possibility of a transcendental philosophy of experience that remains efficacious beyond Benjamin's early work: an "*-ability,*" to refashion Weber's term (4), which can be used to structure and mediate experience, while nonetheless remaining open and malleable with respect to events that should prompt a revision of determinate categories. Benjamin critically moves beyond the Kantian understanding of "transcendental Idealism" —in which experience was subjugated to knowledge and reason as merely "possible experience"[150]—towards a more expansive and open form of transcendental philosophy. To speculatively follow Deleuze, Benjamin formulates a "transcendental empiricism," a systematic mode of philosophical inquiry that is fundamentally open to revision by way of events and experience.[151] Such a model allows the philosophical system to remain open to that which is ephemeral, mythical, and transient: those "micrological" domains considered beyond the domain of conceptual philosophy.

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[149] Despite such invasions, it should be emphasized that Benjamin is not an irrationalist who wishes to wholly dispense with the philosophical system. Instead, a systematic intention continues to subtend his work. As Fenves writes, "The sense that his work is unsystematic and should be classified as "unphilosophical" stems in no small part from his refusal to construct a table of categories, even if only in the mode of negation" (19).

[150] Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* considers "experience" only with respect to its possibility, that is, with respect to the formal conditions which make experience possible, i.e. the categories and intuitions of the mind. Experience is wholly reduced in this schema to an empty form which is merely "given," a placeholder, which has no relevance in itself. Exemplary of this is Kant's discussion of "Object=X" [A103-A111] in the "A version" of the "transcendental deduction": experience is distilled to a mere variable ("x"), a stand in term in the mechanism of consciousness. Schopenhauer has pointed out the contradictions surrounding the "given" nature of Kantian experience, see "Appendix: Criticism of Kantian philosophy" in *The World as Will and Representation* (437-443).

[151] Daniel W. Smith, in both his dissertation "Gilles Deleuze and the Philosophy of Difference: Towards a Transcendental Empiricism" (1997), and his *Essays on Deleuze* (2012), presents Deleuze's thought as a "transcendental empiricism," which seeks to overturn philosophy's Platonic biases of identity and unity, creating a genuine "philosophy of difference," or, a system of thought in which empirical particularity (or "difference") can be thought without reducing it to some taxonomy, concept, or position within a system. As Smith writes, "Difference [for Deleuze] is no longer an empirical relation but becomes a transcendental principle that constitutes the sufficient reason of empirical diversity as such. Deleuze's philosophy can thus accurately be described as a transcendental philosophy—a "transcendental empiricism" as he himself puts its" (*Empiricism*, 1-2). Benjamin's philosophy proceeds in a similar fashion, though instead of "empiricism," Benjamin seeks to liberate "experience" as a singular entity. More remains to be said regarding the philosophical affinities (and differences) between Benjamin and Deleuze, specifically the possibility of supplementing Deleuze with Benjamin's historical sense.

### 3.1.1 Biographical Panorama: The Interconnected Concerns of Benjamin's "Munich Years" 1915-17

"[Benjamin] the friend of a lifetime whose genius united the insight of the metaphysician, the interpretative power of the critic, and the erudition of the scholar."
Scholem, "Dedication," *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism.*

To motivate Benjamin's "coming philosophy," it is useful to provide a brief intellectual-biographical gloss on Benjamin's academic concerns from 1915-17. In the year 1915, the historical upheavals of the First World War notwithstanding, Benjamin enrolled at the University of Munich, where he would remain until 1917. Both McCole and Fenves highlight this period as a formative and transitional period with regard to Benjamin's intellectual concerns. The crises of the First World War, along with the suicide of his close friend from the youth movement, Fritz Heinle, provoked a period of much "stocktaking and reflection" (McCole, 71). The "metaphysical experience" of the First World War solidified Benjamin's movement away from his early associations with the vitalist *Lebensphilosophie* of the German youth movement[152]—particularly because of its dubious politics and associations with German nationalism—to a more articulate and complex understanding of philosophy informed by phenomenology, Neo-Kantianism, the philosophy of language, and emergent mathematics (McCole, 71-115, Fenves, 44-78, 125-151; Caygill,1-22).[153] Benjamin and Scholem engaged in extensive discussions regarding new developments in mathematics, speculating with regard to the

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[152] For more on Benjamin's 1912-14 relationship to the German youth movement, see "Metaphysics of Youth" in *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life.* 33-74. Such a tradition, stemming out of Schlegel, Novalis and Nietzsche, was crystalized in Benjamin's teacher G. Wyneken, who saw "youth" as a "vanguard" sentiment for the awakening of a new humanity (*Ibid.,* 39). See, "The Metaphysics of Youth (*SW 1:* 6-17) and "The Life of Students" (*SW 1:* 37-47 cf. *BC,* 5-46).

[153] Peter Fenves, In The Messianic Reduction, situates Benjamin's early writings within the intellectual context of pre- and post-WW1 Germany, providing remarkable insight into Benjamin's engagement with phenomenology (specifically Husserl), Mathematics (A.W. Shöenflies, B. Russell, G. Scholem, G. Frege), and Marburg Neo-Kantianism (H. Cohen, H. Rickert). Fenves depicts Benjamin's intellectual emergence as a constellation of "Kant, Plato, Husserl and Marburg" (1): arguing that Benjamin's work attempts a certain systematization of philosophy (as in (neo)Kantianism), through the undertaking of a quasi-phenomenological "reduction" (as in Husserl). However, Benjamin's reduction does not result in some purified transcendental subject of perception; instead, it reveals fundamental antinomies in the subject's relationship to time and history. Describing the thesis of his work, Fenves will write: "The task around which Benjamin's work comes to revolve does not consist in accomplishing the reduction of the natural-mythological attitude through a heroic exertion of philosophical will but, rather, in discovering the tension between the non-directionality of time and the uni-directionality of history. The tension itself has a direction, which can be discerned in certain works of art and stretches of time: 'towards the messianic'" (4). According to Fenves Benjamin's work does not culminate in some "heroic exertion of philosophy" (8-9), but rather in fundamental existential, metaphysical, and mathematical antinomies.

new philosophical modes of grounding provided by non-standard mathematics (*BC,* 81-2, 97-102; Scholem, *Friendship,* 46-8). It is during this Munich period that Benjamin attempts to formulate a speculative form of Neo-Kantian transcendental philosophy: one founded not upon the transcendental unity of the categories of the mind (as in Kant), but rather, on a transcendental understanding of language as the mediate condition of all thinking.

Fenves has located Benjamin's intellectual relationship with Felix Noggerath – whom Benjamin dubbed simply "the genius" (*BC,* 86-7)—as foundational for Benjamin's position with respect to Kant and the philosophical system, solidifying Benjamin's early commitment to a modified vision of transcendental philosophy.[154] Though Benjamin was dedicated to an expanded conception of experience, particularly with respect to "mythological" domains, he was unwilling to wholly abandon Kant's transcendental understanding of philosophy. Instead, Benjamin strove to "meta-critically" work through the Kantian program.[155] Through such critical engagements, Benjamin was able to move past Kant's reification of experience as "possible experience," whilst rejecting the outdated Newtonian conception of mathematical physics inherent in the Kantian world view.[156] Such undertakings demonstrate Benjamin's commitment to reading Kant

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[154]Fenves—particularly in his 2017 address at the Benjamin Symposium "Force and Messianicty," as well as in *The Messianic Reduction*—has repeatedly asserted the importance of F. Noeggerath in crystalizing Benjamin's conception of philosophy. Noeggerath's dissertation, "Synthesis and the Concept of System in Philosophy: A Contribution to the Critique of Anti-Rationalism," attempted to define a revised Neo-Kantian philosophy "which recast[ed] the relational categories of Kantian critique in terms of the mathematical concept of seriality" (Fenves, 113). Such a recasting provided the means to salvage the concept of system (or transcendental philosophy) against the challenges of a Bergsonian vitalism. McCole, however, has asserted, "Benjamin's intellectual debt to Noeggerath was real, but it should not be exaggerated" (75). Much of this scholarly divergence can be explained with respect to varying interpretations of the importance of mathematics to Benjamin's philosophy, with Fenves seeing Benjamin as fundamentally influenced by debates in mathematics of the time (112-118;125-130), and with McCole according more importance to Benjamin's "long term intellectual strategy" of undertaking an immanent critique of Romanticism (71-115).

[155] McCole asserts that "The philosophical consequences of a doctrine of mythos...fascinated Benjamin" (74), as Benjamin engaged with comparative mythology, seeking to understand the various mechanisms through which myth and religion were transmitted throughout history and as such dialogued with thinkers such as Ernst Cassirer, Herman Cohen and Walter Lehman. McCole has also stressed myth as a "placeholder term" (74) for Benjamin, connoting a constellation of entities beyond the usual conceptual purview of philosophy.

[156] Fenves has noted Benjamin's active engagement with contemporary debates in mathematics, which allowed him to think through questions relating to set theory, non-Euclidian geometry, and the issues arising from Einstein's doctrine of relativity (see, *The Messianic Reduction,* 112-118, 136-9). Given the

"against the grain," that is, attempting to move beyond Kant by way of the Kantian program.

McCole has aptly highlighted five intersecting concerns that occupied Benjamin during his "Munich years" (71-9). Presented in constellation, these concerns demonstrate the fundamental motivations for Benjamin's programmatic "coming philosophy." These are: 1) the articulation of philosophy in a "systematic manner"; 2) the acknowledgement and incorporation of mythological and spiritual forms of experience into philosophy; 3) the articulation of a philosophy of history; 4) the creation of a "non-instrumental theory of language"; and 5) thinking through a non-instrumental theory of politics. It should be underscored that Benjamin does not strive to deduce a philosophy that would articulate these concerns definitively; rather, in opening the philosophical architectonic by way of experience, he creates an expanded notion of the philosophical system that is able to arrange and mediate insights from each of these domains in constellation. In his 1918 "On the Program for a Coming Philosophy" ("Program" hereafter) Benjamin lays the methodological groundwork for such a constellation of these domains, based upon his modification of Kantian transcendental philosophy.

### 3.2 On the Program for a Coming Philosophy (1918): Benjamin's Philosophy for the Future

> "I believe in philosophy as a system. For me, the system must not only be in perpetual heterogeneity, it must be a heterogenesis, which is something, it seems to me, that has never been attempted." Deleuze, "Preface" in Jean-Clet Martin, *Variations,* 7.

In a 1917 letter to Scholem, Benjamin avers: "there will never be any question of the Kantian system's being shaken and toppled. Rather, the question is much more one of the system's being set in granite and universally developed...no matter how great the number of Kantian minutiae may have to fade away, his system's typology must last forever" (*BC,* 97).[157] Such a project of "setting" and developing the Kantian

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grounding of Kantian philosophy on the Newtonian world view, one can speculate as to what new modes of philosophical grounding are allowed by non-standard models of mathematics. Benjamin labeled Einstein an avant-garde "new constructor" (*SW 2:* 732-3), one who provided the mathematical (or ontological) basis for a new modern theory of experience, one attuned with the relativistic complexities of everyday life.

[157] Benjamin goes on to describe this typology in relation to Plato, the only figure "within the realm of philosophy... [Kant's] typology can be compared with. Only in the spirit of Kant and Plato and, I believe, by means of the revision and further development of Kant, can philosophy become doctrine, or at least, be

transcendental program—particularly with respect to a greater array of experience—is undertaken explicitly and implicitly throughout Benjamin's early work: "the ambition to extend and transform Kant's concept of experience is the thread which runs through Benjamin's otherwise disparate early writings" (Caygill, 1). Kant remains efficacious for Benjamin due to his continuing belief in the possibility of philosophy as a systematic practice, against the challenges of empiricist skepticism (from Hume), and advances in mathematics and the physical sciences (from Newton). In a similar manner, for Benjamin, the possibility of philosophy must be affirmed against the historical and existential crises of his age: the dissolution of Idealism, along with growing advances in technology (photography and film), and revolutions in mathematics and physics (Einstein). It is this systematic possibility of philosophy—thought as what I will term Benjamin's transcendental philosophy of experience—that is essayistically figured in his "Program."

Despite being only ten pages, Benjamin's "Program" crystalizes, in manifesto like fashion, his avant-garde and aleatory reading of Kant, a thinker he meta-critically redeems as providing the resources to think a philosophy for the future. Though he turns to Kant in a neo-Kantian fashion, Benjamin's interventions should be considered post-Kantian, in line with the experimental absolute Idealist invasions performed upon Kant by the *Frühromantiker,* Schelling and Hegel. Benjamin's text commences programmatically in a style reminiscent of his early writings from the youth movement, and in a manner that echoes the sentiments of his early letter to Scholem: "The central task of the coming philosophy will be to take the deepest intimations it draws from our times and our expectation of a great future, and turn them into knowledge by relating them to the Kantian system" (*SW 1:* 100). It should be emphasized that Benjamin moves decidedly against the Neo-Kantian, overly scientific, interpretation of the critical project: one which sought to elucidate a scientifically verifiable epistemology via an interpretation of the *CPR* (Beiser, *Neo-Kantianism,* 3, 6).[158] For Benjamin, such positivist

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incorporated into it" (*BC,* 97). This doublet of Plato and Kant is further considered throughout Benjamin's "Epistemo-Critical Prologue."

[158] Benjamin's relationship with Neo-Kantianism is ambiguous and contradictory. His early writings and correspondence with Scholem demonstrate a desire to work through Kant in a manner akin to Herman

interpretations of Kant served to erect a new mythology of enlightenment conceptual imperialism in which, "naked, primitive, self-evident experience...seemed to be the only experience given—indeed, the only experience possible" (*SW 1:* 101). For Benjamin, the rigid "epistemological mythology" of the "subject-object" model of cognition is emblematic of the "religious and historical blindness of the enlightenment" (*SW 1*: 103). Through its abject denial of other ways of relating to the world, enlightenment itself became a mythology: one which lionized a dominating notion of the subject at the expense of other non-conceptual ways of interacting with the world, denying the diversity of possible "objects" a seat at the philosophical table. However, Benjamin (at this early juncture) follows neo-Kantianism in seeing Kant as providing the "epigenetic" conditions for a new transcendental philosophy of the future, though such a philosophy must remain fundamentally open to the diversity of possible experiences.

For Benjamin, one must meet the Kantian program with "a truly time and eternity conscious philosophy," creating a new historically cognizant model of philosophy which could incorporate a diversity of domains and experiences (*SW 1:* 103). Benjamin's attempt to revitalize Kant in a historical manner should be seen in constellation with similar projects undertaken by his contemporaries Heidegger and Bergson.[159] However, Benjamin must be distinguished from both vitalist and phenomenological "attempted breakouts" from the metaphysical tradition (Adorno, *ND Lectures,* 65-75), most forcefully due to his unique conception of language. Such a philosophy of epistemic finitude, which is nonetheless historically conscious, would inaugurate a "prolegomena to a future metaphysics," and "in the process... envision... this higher experience" (*SW* 1: 102). In his 1917 fragment "On Perception," Benjamin explicates this metaphysics:

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Cohen (whose 1871 *Kant's Theory of Experience* Benjamin attempted to read with Scholem). See*,* Scholem, *Friendship,* 58-60. However, Benjamin quickly became dissatisfied with the heavily scientific positivist cast of Neo-Kantian thought, opting instead to fracture Kant by way of experience, language, and religion.

[159] More remains to be said regarding Benjamin's precise relationship to his contemporaries. All three are united by a desire to move beyond Kant by way of the Kantian program, and one can see Bergson's *Matter and Memory* (1896) as an attempt to think the polarities of "matter" and "memory" (or subject and object) in terms of a "difference of degree" (not of kind). (9-16, 23-4). Likewise, Heidegger, whose *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* appeared in 1929, sought to work through Kant so as to lay the groundwork for his own "fundamental ontology" (*Kant,* 3- 5), a project taken up with more depth in *Being and Time* (1927).

"Philosophy is absolute experience deduced in a systematic, symbolic framework as language" (*SW 1:* 96).

Benjamin's "higher" conception of experience does not necessitate some purified or more scientific form of (Neo) Kantianism. Instead, Benjamin problematizes the Kantian architectonic by confronting it with its disavowed phantasms, with those domains downgraded by Kant as "dogmatic": "art, jurisprudence... history," "religion" along with its historical transmission in the form of "doctrine" [*Lehre*], and most notably, "language" (*SW 1:* 107-108; *GS II:* 165-167). [160] Such a critical confrontation with Kant allows Benjamin to "test the limits of philosophy" (Caygill, xiii), opening up new productive and interdisciplinary constellations, while rethinking the position of philosophy within the organization of knowledge more generally. Fundamentally, Benjamin seeks to problematize, while opening, the Kantian relationship between the experiential and the transcendental moments of knowledge, allowing the former to reciprocally influence the latter. Describing this, Benjamin writes:

> The problem faced by Kantian epistemology, as by every great epistemology, has two sides, and Kant managed to give a valid explanation for only one of them. First of all, there was the question of the certainty of knowledge that is lasting, and second, there was the question of the integrity of an experience [*Erfahrung*] that is ephemeral [*Vergänglich*]. (*SW 1:* 100; *GS II:* 158)

Though Kant had securely grounded knowledge by tethering the understanding to the domain of *a priori* intuitions (of space and time), in the process he reduced "experience" to a mere afterthought: a simple function of knowledge, something which one must accept as merely "given from without" (Schopenhauer, 438). For Benjamin, such deficits in the Kantian program do not necessitate the elimination of the transcendental system, nor the dispensation of epistemic certainty, but rather, the dialectical opening of the domains of system and experience into a more porous and reciprocally interactive relationship. Such an untethering allows for the possibility of new productive conflicts between the faculties of knowledge, as experience is allowed to meaningfully contribute

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[160] Speaking to the importance of language (and religion) for his philosophy of the future, Benjamin will write: "A concept of knowledge gained from reflection on the linguistic nature of knowledge will create a corresponding concept of experience which will also encompass realms that Kant failed to truly systematize. The realm of religion should be mentioned as the foremost of these" (*SW 1:* 108).

to knowledge. However, Benjamin stresses that such an opening of the Kantian program does not necessitate the disregard of knowledge in favour of experience beyond the reach of the system: philosophy must maintain its transcendental basis. Benjamin affirms Kant's transcendental grounding for philosophy: "Philosophy is based upon the fact that the structure of experience lies within the structure of knowledge and is to be developed from it" (*SW 1:* 104). Though the transcendental must be moved away from the subject, "all genuine experience rests upon the 'pure epistemological (transcendental) consciousness,' if this term is still useable under the condition that it be stripped of everything subjective" (*SW 1:* 104). Benjamin's problem is not with the philosophical system as such, nor with Kant's coupling of experience and knowledge, but rather, with the fact that such a doublet remains too subjective, caught within a problematically narrow subject-object model of cognition, which gives an excessive primacy to the categories and functions of the subject. The task of a coming philosophy must involve the elaboration of a new transcendental philosophy of experience, one purged of "everything subjective," and resting on a sphere of "total neutrality between subject and object" (*SW 1:* 104), which, I will argue is language. That is, the task for a philosophy of the future will necessitate the thought of experience in a dynamic and reflexive relation to its conditions, creating plastic and historically malleable categories for philosophy— providing an epigenesis of the transcendental.

Benjamin chastises those who would simply disregard Kant's employment of language: such arguments are weak and fail to understand the seriousness of Kant's transcendental enterprise (*SW* 1: 108). A "coming philosophy" must not simply criticize Kant for his failure to understand language or for his terminological inconsistency, but instead, it must undertake the "relating [of] knowledge to language as was attempted by Hamann in Kant's lifetime" (*SW* 1:108).[161] Benjamin speculates that Kant was perhaps too blinded by Newtonian advances in the mathematical and physical sciences such that he failed to comprehend the extent to which "all philosophical knowledge has its unique expression in language and not in formulas or numbers" (*SW* 1: 108). The Kantian critical

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[161] Stern has provided an extensive overview of Benjamin's relationship with the linguistic-cultural philosophy of Hamann, see "Part 2: The History of Language as Such" (141-290), in *The Fall of Language: Benjamin and Wittgenstein on Meaning.*

project explicitly modeled itself after the mathematical sciences, striving for the same clarity and universality, such that experience was reduced to its mere possibility: the formal play of faculties and categories (*CPR,* 107-8, 110-1). In moving transcendental philosophy away from epistemology and consciousness and towards language, Benjamin enacts a reversal of the Kantian program: the world of experience is not reduced to some finite table of categories and intuitions, but rather, structure (understood as language) takes its cue from experiences in the world. The final section of this chapter (3.4), dealing with language, will elaborate this more fully.

Given the immense scale and complexity of the Kantian critical enterprise, for Benjamin, the question becomes: which of its elements should be enlarged or amended, and which should be simply discarded? That is, how can Kant's transcendental Idealism be refashioned such that it can express a greater continuum of experiences? As Benjamin asserts, "The table of categories must be completely revised" (*SW 1:* 106), moving philosophy away from Kant's a-historical deductions to a historically informed perspective which would "allow insight into the origins of knowledge" (*SW* 1: 107). Benjamin contends that domains such as "art, jurisprudence, and history" must be allowed to influence the transcendental philosophical system with "much more intensity" than allowed by Kant (*SW* 1: 107). With such proclamations, Benjamin is squarely within the German Idealist field of concerns, following thinkers such as Schelling and Hegel who sought to expand the purview of philosophy to a broader range of "experiences," envisioning an enlarged notion of reason, along with a reciprocal dialogue between the experiential and transcendental moments of knowledge.

In line with Adorno's post-Idealist perspective, Benjamin is committed to "working through" the Kantian program, refashioning its concepts instead of wholly dispensing with them. Benjamin is emphatic that the discrete domains of the critical project must be maintained: "The trichotomy of the Kantian system is one of the great features of that typology that must be preserved" (*SW 1:* 106). That is, Benjamin (at this early stage) remains committed to the division of philosophy into speculative, ethical (or practical), and aesthetic-judgmental, domains, corresponding to the three Kantian critiques; though he seeks to open and problematize the rigidity of such divisions

(Caygill, 24-5).[162] Further, Benjamin deconstructs Kant's regulative employment of religion as a capstone to both pure reason and ethics (practical reason), specifically with respect to Kant's regulative postulate of the "Idea of God" (*CPR,* 677, 682-4). For Benjamin, religion must be unbound from such a position of subservience, becoming a site of violent and critical "interruption" with respect to philosophy (Missac, 29). Throughout his oeuvre, one can see Benjamin employing religion and mythology in a "critical" manner, harnessing motifs from such domains to short-circuit philosophy's constitutive stability: perhaps most notably, his employment of Judaic messianism in the historiographical domain (*SW 4:* 389-411). Schelling undertakes a similar confrontation between philosophy, religion, and nature in texts from his middle period, in which philosophy is constantly exposed to its naturalistic "living ground," along with the "self-lacerating madness" of God's duality, forcing it to reckon with logics other than itself, and short circuiting its absolute ambitions (*FE,* 26; *AW,* 103).

Towards the end of the essay, Benjamin begins to elaborate his own novel conception of the philosophical system ordered around the principle of "non-synthesis": "besides the concept of synthesis, another concept, that of a certain non-synthesis of two concepts in another, will become very important systematically, since another relation between thesis and anti-thesis is possible besides synthesis" (*SW 1:* 106).[163] Such claims are later elaborated in Benjamin's "Epistemo-Critical Prologue," where Benjamin describes "the Idea" as a "non-synthesis" between "concept and phenomena," resulting in a tenuous negative dialectical unity between "unique and extreme" (*OT,* 35). Though Benjamin does not fully flesh out such a framework in his 1918 program, one can see how the possibility of a system founded upon "non-synthesis" is unfolded throughout his oeuvre (Weber, 50, 119, 165). Such a negative dialectical understanding of philosophy corresponds to Benjamin's "antinomical" (McCole, 10) relationship to the philosophical tradition: one which affirms mosaics of discord and tension, over and against synthesis

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[162] On this point, Benjamin anticipates Deleuze's later call to de-territorialize and experiment with differing relations between the Kantian faculties of knowledge (Deleuze, *Kant,* 68).

[163] Such an emergent negative dialectic has evident Schellingian valences, specifically the 1815 *Ages of the World,* in which the "third term" is unable to be thought from a position of syntheses (64, 75-91; Rajan, "Psychoanalysis," 9). One can locate a similar negative dialectical motif of tension or non-synthesis throughout Benjamin, Adorno, Schelling and Hegel.

and unity.[164]

Such a refractory conception of systematicity allows Benjamin to develop his linguistic-transcendental account of knowledge, which would correspond to the kaleidoscopic variety of possible experiences. In the cryptic addendum of the work, Benjamin muses extensively on the relationship between "epistemology, metaphysics and religion" (*SW 1:* 108),[165] reflections which invade the Kantian critical project by way of those domains deemed "dogmatic," or unworthy of critical reflection. As McCole points out, "myth," for Benjamin, remains something of an empty signifier, a placeholder term, encompassing in constellation those domains beyond the scope the philosophical concept (74). Adorno groups a similar assemblage of terms under "non-identity": "non-conceptuality, individuality, and particularity...things which...used to be dismissed as transitory" (*ND,* 8, 11-12, 162-3, 326-30). To philosophically interrogate such domains, Benjamin turns to the discourse of religion, specifically, the Judaic notion of "the teachings [or doctrine]" [*Lehre*]: the "Philosophical concept of experience must answer the religious concept of teachings" (*SW* 1: 110; *GS II:* 164-5).[166] Myth, by becoming historical through its transmission, enters into language, and so becomes "communicable." Likewise, when philosophy is taught or transmitted from teacher to student—by way of a "weak messianic" pact between generations (*SW 4:* 390)—it forms

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[164] Throughout his oeuvre, Benjamin presents his own thought in terms of antinomies which he takes to their respective extremes without resolution (such as those between "theology/materialism"; "mythical violence/divine violence"; "commentary/criticism"; "allegory/symbol"). Scholem has aptly described such a proto-deconstructive approach as Benjamin's "two-sidedness" (*Zweigleisigkeit*), or "Janus faced" character (*Story,* 197-8), in which oppositions are employed strategically—in order to "shock" and provoke reflection in the reader (*OT,* 4) —and no synthesis or final resolution is granted.

[165] In this early essay, Benjamin refashions the notion of "metaphysics," seemingly collapsing a hard distinction between metaphysics and experience, speculating as to the possibility of "metaphysical experience" in a manner akin to Adorno: "The meaning of the term 'metaphysical,' as introduced in the foregoing, consists precisely in declaring this border nonexistent, and the reformulation of 'experience' as 'metaphysics' means that so-called experience is virtually included in the metaphysical or dogmatic part of philosophy, into which the highest epistemological—that is, the critical—is transformed" (*SW 1:* 109). He goes further: "To say that knowledge is metaphysical means in the strict sense: it is related via the original concept of knowledge to the concrete totality of experience—that is, existence" (*SW 1:*110).

[166] Benjamin highlights the critical-destructive power of *Lehre* (and education)*,* in a letter to Scholem: "Theory [*Lehre*] is like a surging sea, but for the wave (if we take it as an image of the human being) everything depends on giving oneself over to its motion in such a way that it crests and overturns, foaming. The tremendous freedom of this overturning is education... [it is] tradition becoming visible and free." *BC,* 94. For the rendering of *Lehre* as "Theory" see McCole, 77. Such theological motifs highlight what E. Jacobson has termed "the messianic idea in Benjamin's early writings (see, 19-51).

a profane affinity with religious notions: "Only in teaching does philosophy encounter something absolute" (*SW* 1: 109). Benjamin's "Life of Students" (1914-5) expounds on this relationship between education, historical-critique, and the absolute, demonstrating Benjamin's early obsession with a Nietzschean conception of youth as a means to re-invigorate the practice of knowledge. In language anticipating his later writings on the philosophy of history (1937-40), Benjamin depicts students (who provide "an image of the highest metaphysical state of history"), as receiving "the historical task...to disclose [the] immanent state of perception and make it absolute, to make it visible and dominant in the present" (*SW 1:* 37).[167] Via their "weak messianism," student-critics become critical inheritors of the past, articulating past experiences (by way of language), thus allowing philosophy to be seen as "absolute experience deduced in a systematic, symbolic framework as language" (*SW 1:* 96). Accordingly, Benjamin's program for a philosophy of the future can be surmised as the articulation of an expanded philosophy of experience, which remains transcendentally grounded in language. In what follows, these two domains—experience (3.3) and language (3.4)— as they present themselves in Benjamin's work will be critically examined.

### 3.3    Benjamin's Philosophy of Experience [*Erfahrung*]

"For what is the value of all our culture if it is divorced from experience? Indeed (let's admit it), our poverty of experience is not merely poverty on a personal level, but poverty of experience in general. Hence a new kind of Barbarism." Benjamin, "Experience and Poverty," *SW 2:* 732.

In what follows, the operative conception of "experience" in Benjamin's oeuvre will be charted. As has already been argued, Benjamin's thinking attempts to open and problematize the static enlightenment understanding of experience (personified in Kant), allowing philosophy to productively encounter a plethora of new domains and territories. [168] Such a polyvalent understanding of experience allows Benjamin to experiment with

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[167] For Benjamin, "students" must come to realize the historical aspect of their experience, recognizing that they stand in the 'middle of history' and have the ability to rewrite (or re-archive) the past from their perspective. The "students" are the "highest metaphysically" in that they are able to construct history from their perspective in the present—they are able to *act* with respect to the past (*SW 1:* 37). Such models will later be taken up and elaborated in Benjamin's 1940 "Theses on the Concept of History" (*SW 4:* 390-4).
[168] Describing Benjamin's contamination of philosophy by way of experience, Caygill writes: "The concept of experience necessarily exceeds philosophy, and puts into question the relationship between philosophical reflection and its objects. To a large extent Benjamin's thought may be understood as an attempt to extend

constructive relations between subject and object, or the experiential and transcendental domains. Stated otherwise, against Kant, who reduced experience to its "possibility" (or general form), Benjamin sought to develop formal structures for thought that are able to dynamically respond to events in the world, revising themselves based on encounters with what Adorno will later term "metaphysical experiences" (*Metaphysics,* 137-145). To place such a primacy on experience is, following Deleuze, to "overturn Platonism": to create a mode of thought that is receptive and relevant to "real" experience, not simply its formal conditions of possibility (*Logic of Sense*, 253-266).[169] In such a manner, Benjamin forces philosophy into productive encounters with a diversity of "experiences": literature, mythology, religion, history, drugs, urban experience, technology, and modern life all invade and trouble philosophy. Benjamin's many writings on Modernity typify this primacy of experience: as a constellation of texts (from ~1931-40), they seek to chart the effects, or the experience, of modernization upon the human sensorium. "Modernity" can be broadly defined as the experience of modernization, wherein traditional forms of life are both liquefied and reified, provoking a feeling of groundlessness which forces human beings to attempt to "become subjects as well as objects of modernization, to get a grip on the modern world and make themselves at home in it" (Berman, 5). Given such a definition, one can see that in the twenty-first century one does not exist within some "post-modern" paradigm, wherein the trajectories of Modernity have been somehow overcome, but rather, we, as subjects and objects of modernization, are still attempting to

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the limits of experience treated within philosophy to the point where the identity of philosophy itself is jeopardized. In place of a philosophical mastery of experience, whether that of art, of religion, of language or of the city, Benjamin allows experience to test the limits of philosophy. The work of philosophical criticism according to the 'method called nihilism' allows experience to invade, evade and even ruin its philosophical host" (xiii).

[169] Smith reads Deleuze's philosophy as a similar overturning of the Kantian critical project, which is then completed in empirical terms, transforming Kant's transcendental Idealism into a transcendental empiricism. Such a philosophy would account for "the real conditions of genesis"—as opposed to the mere formal conditions provided by Kant—a "properly immanent account of the genesis of knowledge, morality, and even reason itself" (Smith, *Transcendental,* 5-6). The implications of such an overturning are wide ranging, though in the ethical sphere, Deleuze inaugurates a new (stoic) "ethics of the event," a mode of thinking which embraces "the accident," or the contingencies of experience (Deleuze, *Logic,* 148). Describing his ethics of the event, Deleuze will write: "Either ethics makes no sense at all, or is what it means and has something else to say: not to be unworthy of what happens to us...to will and release the event, to become the offspring of one's own events, and thereby to be reborn" (*Logic,* 149). See further, "Twenty-First Series of the Event" (*Logic,* 148-153, and 183-5, 130).

come to terms with the experience of Modernity, and have perhaps "never been modern" (Latour, 10-12).

Benjamin's thought should be seen as an attempt to force an encounter of philosophy with Modernity, with Benjamin being a philosophical "modernist" in a similar manner to Adorno (Bernstein, "Modernism," 56-7). As Baudelaire and Rimbaud laboured to create new forms of art worthy of the tensions of modern life, so too did Benjamin strive to theorize new avant-garde models for philosophy in sync with modern times. Benjamin, via Baudelaire, describes Modernity as this feeling of vertigo at the liquidation of stability, rupturing both tradition and experience, a time in which "all that is solid melts into air."[170] As will be argued, the Modern crisis of "experience" [*Erfahrung*] clears the way for new constructive notions of the human subject (3.3.1), informed by what Benjamin terms, in Nietzschean fashion, the "new barbarism" of the avant-garde (3.3.2). Following this, Benjamin's "mimetic subject"—or the receptive materialist subject of experience subtending his philosophy—will be analyzed in relation to the theories of media and mediation developed by Marshall McLuhan (3.3.3).

### 3.3.1 Experience in Modernity (Or Experience in Crisis)

> *"La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers*
> *Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;*
> *L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles*
> *Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers."*
> Baudelaire, *"Correspondences," Les Fleurs du Mal,* 37.

At the conclusion of his 1939 "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" Benjamin signs off his discussion with a reading of Baudelaire's "Loss of A Halo," describing the melancholic image of Baudelaire, the "epic poet" of Modernity, losing his poetic "Halo" as he is jostled backward by the rabbling crowd of modern life. As Benjamin's "angel of

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[170] Echoing such sentiments, though with sparse reference to Benjamin, Marshall Berman (in his *All That is Solid Melts into Air* [1982]) describes modern life as a "life of paradox and contradiction" (13), in which "becoming Modern" entails both a celebration and mourning of the liquidation of tradition. Berman's sets out to describe "the meanings of Modernity," with all of its "ambiguities and ironies" (13), through readings of various thinkers (notably Goethe, Marx and Baudelaire). Despite their seeming divergences, these thinkers are united by a distinctly "modern" intellectual sentiment. As Berman writes: "They are moved at once by a will to change—to transform both themselves and the world—and by a terror of disorientation and disintegration, of life falling apart. They all know the thrill and the dread of a world in which 'all that is solid melts into air'" (13).

history" is blown backward by the "storm called progress," Baudelaire, the poet of Modern life, had no place in the epoch he described (*SW 4:* 392). Recounting such a tragic scene, Benjamin writes:

> Baudelaire singled out his having been jostled by the crowd as the decisive, unmistakable experience. The semblance [*Schein*] of a crowd with a soul and movement all its own, the luster that had dazzled the flâneur, had faded for him. To heighten the impression of the crowd's baseness, he envisioned the day on which even the fallen women, the outcasts, would readily espouse a well ordered life, condemn libertinism, and reject everything except money. Betrayed by these last allies of his, Baudelaire battled the crowd—with the impotent rage of someone fighting the rain or the wind. This is the nature of the immediate experience [*Erlebnis*] to which Baudelaire had given the weight of long experience [*Erfahrung*]. He named the price for which the sensation of modernity could be had: the disintegration of the aura in immediate shock-experience. (*SW 4:* 343; *GS I:* 653)

Baudelaire attempted to experience [*Erfahren*], in a durational sense, the destruction of experience that formed the essence of modern life. Within Modernity, such durational and historically situated experiences of tradition—which can be termed "*Erfahrungen*"— were surpassed by the reproducible and momentary "shock" experiences of modern life.[171] Baudelaire's 1865 poem, "*Perte d'auréole*" [Loss of Halo] depicts a poet who has lost his auratic "halo," and with it his Platonic remove from everyday life, entering into dialogue with a man on the boulevard. The modern poet embraces his newfound immanent relationship to the world: "Now I can go about incognito, do bad things and indulge in vulgar behavior like ordinary mortals" (Baudelaire, *Spleen,* 94). Benjamin allegorizes such a scene to describe both his and Baudelaire's affirmative and destructive relationship to Modernity: one must embrace the experiences of shock that is modern life, according the immediate and leveling experiences of the everyday [*Erlebnis*] the weight of a meaningful *Erfahrung*, experiencing the destruction of experience. In his considerations of surrealism, Benjamin terms such a practice "profane illumination" (*SW 2:* 109): a dialectical optic which sees transcendence in the micrological particularities of modern life.

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[171] Elsewhere in the essay, Benjamin describes the ubiquity of such a "shock-experience" in modern life: "What determines the rhythm of production on a conveyor belt is the same thing that underlies the rhythm of reception in the film. … The shock experience [*Chockerlebnis*] which the passer-by has in the crowd corresponds to the isolated 'experiences' of the worker at his machine" (*SW 4:* 328-9; *GS I:* 632). Kittler locates a similar shock experience at the origin of cinema, which he describes as an afterimage of automatic weaponry and the shock experiences of WW1 (see *Gramophone*, 124-30, 115-19).

Modernity provoked a plethora of questions regarding the changing role of experience, the function of technology in shaping and organizing perception, along with with an inquiry into the continuing efficacy of traditional forms of life. As spectators to the upheavals and crises of the Weimar Republic (1919-33), many in Benjamin's generation responded to such atrophies of experience by embracing forms of "reactionary modernism": dangerous political and aesthetic programs that attempted a nostalgic return to a pastoral utopia unshaken by the pressures of modern life.[172]  Benjamin is unique in his critical embeddedness within many trajectories of modernization: he did not straightforwardly embrace Modernity, nor did he nostalgically mourn the loss of tradition (McCole, 8). His relationship to both tradition and Modern life remains paradoxical, antinomical, "non-synchronous" (Bloch, *Heritage,* 22-30), and oftentimes contradictory.

Against Heidegger and other "reactionary modernists" of Weimar Germany (Carl Schmitt, Ernst Junger, Oswad Spengler), Benjamin rejected any nostalgic discourse which lamented the changes modern life out of a desire to return to some mythological provincial community. For Benjamin, experience (in the sense of *Erfahrung*) should not be fetishized as some primordial or authentic structure, but rather, should be seen as already temporal, fleeting, transient, and historical— "*une passante*" (Baudelaire, *Fleurs,* 127)— as that which cannot be reified into some fundamental structure or capacity. For Benjamin, to question the possibility of experience in modern life is not merely to attempt to expand the domain of *a priori* intuitions considered within the philosophical purview beyond Kant's consideration of space and time, or to imagine new modern categories. Instead, one must consider how experiences, or events, should prompt a revision of constitutive philosophical categories. Benjamin's considerations of experience in modern life are not animated by some nostalgia for destroyed forms of life. For Benjamin, criticism must interrogate how Modernity at once destroys traditional forms of experience, while molding news capacities for experience. One must scrutinize what new

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[172] The term "reactionary modernism" stems from J. Herf's text of the same name, and describes a certain intellectual field pervading Weimar Germany, typified by the work of Heidegger, Junger, and Schmitt (1-48). Such thinkers sought to combine technological modernity with romanticized pastoral values. Such an intellectual field is criticized extensively by Adorno in his 1964 *Jargon of Authenticity* (xix-xxii, 3-9, 31-34, 48-50, 59, 65, 68, 73, 78, 98-99, 106, 138-40, 157-9, 164-5).

aptitudes are opened for philosophy by modern experiences. It is such a constellation of concerns that Benjamin responds to with his engagement with avant-garde practices throughout the 1930s.

### 3.3.2 Experience and the Avant-Garde: Towards a "New Barbarism"

"It might be stated as a general formula that the technology of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the sphere of tradition. By replicating the work many times over, it substitutes a mass existence for a unique existence." Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility," *SW 3*: 254.

A peculiar difficulty in approaching Benjamin's discussions of experience is the ambiguous normative value he accords to the waning of experience (in the sense of durational *Erfahrung*). In one sense, Benjamin's longing for "authentic" or "durational" experience" can be seen in analogue with Heidegger's search for some authentic "Being" amidst the leveling powers of modern life –the forces of the public, or "the they" (*Being & Time,* 111, 122-6). While in another sense, Benjamin seems to celebrate the crises and alterations of modern life, seeing such crises as new occasions for theory. With regard to the first sense, Benjamin constantly speaks of the "poverty" or "inflation" of experience within the context of modern life (*SW 2:*7 31). Analogously, Heidegger speaks of a "forgetting" or covering over of the "sense of Being" amidst the prattle of Modernity (*Being,* xxix, 1-3). In texts such as "The Storyteller" (1936), along with his writings on Baudelaire (1937-40), Benjamin speaks disparagingly of the leveling effects of Modernity: he describes its destruction of the "capacity to tell a story," along with other durational forms of experience, forms of life which are replaced by incessant drivel of "information"(*SW 3:*148).[173] Benjamin's choices of textual objects reveals a preference for the "outdated," or what he asserts apropos of surrealism, "a revolutionary energy that exists in that which is outmoded" (*SW* 2: 210).[174] In such a manner, one can read

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[173] Differentiating "storytelling," which conveys a durational form of experience [*Erfahrung*], from the "information" provided by the modern culture industry [*Erlebnis*], Benjamin writes: "The value of information does not survive the moment in which it was new. It lives only at the moment; it has to surrender to it completely and explain itself to it without losing any time. A story is different. It does not expend itself. It preserves and concentrates its energy and is capable of releasing it after a long time" (*SW 3:* 148). Adorno translates Benjamin's notion unreflective "information" to describe the unreflective art of the "culture industry" (*DE,* 94-136).

[174] Such a desire to recover the "utopian impulses" of previous ages has evident Blochian affinities, see Bloch, *The Principle of Hope* (3-18).

Benjamin as one who attempts to critically rescue downcast literary, cultural, and intellectual movements, such as the German *Trauerspiel,* surrealism, or the historicism of Eduard Fuchs, as Benjamin sought to employ the critical power of tradition as bastion against the leveling forces of modern life.

However, in light of the "destructive character" of Benjamin's model of criticism, one can also read Benjamin as celebrating Modernity's fracturing of experience and tradition: Modernity "forces [us] to start from scratch; to make a new start; to make a little go a long way; to begin with a little and build up further, looking neither left or right. Among the great creative spirits, there have always been the inexorable ones who begin by clearing a *tabula rasa*. They need a drawing table; they were constructors" (*SW 2:* 733). Modernity, with its energetic and crushing liquidations, has created space, allowing for the construction of new experiences: new relationships between nature, history, technology, and community. To create such forms of life, Benjamin calls for a "new barbarism," a Nietzschean "second innocence," which would allow for the creation of novel values able to live up to the new capacities afforded by Modern life (*SW 2:* 733; cf. Nietzsche, *Will,* 478-82). Under the influence of a Brechtian form of anti-auratic constructivism, Benjamin celebrates the destruction of the "cult-value" of tradition: one must be anti-nostalgic, embracing the tensions of Modern life. Benjamin is one who follows Rimbaud's proclamation: "*il faut être absolument moderne"* (88-89)*.* In this manner, for Benjamin, the dissolution or "poverty" of experience has an affirmative and creative valence: "Poverty of Experience. This should not be understood to mean that people are yearning for new experience. No, they long to free themselves from experience; they long for a world in which they can make such pure and decided use of their poverty" (*SW 2*: 734). Benjamin argues that avant-garde aesthetic production (and criticism) should play a leading role in the creation of such new-utopian visions, as he praises a vast array of Modern thinkers and constructors: P. Klee, A. Einstein, B. Brecht, P. Scheerbart, even R. Descartes (*SW 2:* 732-3). These thinkers laboured to forge a new culture through which to break free of the weight of the past: "In its buildings, pictures, and stories, mankind is preparing to outlive culture, if need be" (*SW 2:* 735). Avant-garde culture must play a pivotal role in experimenting with new configurations between the nature, history, and technology, while forging new extension of human cognitive

faculties. Like Nietzsche's philosopher-artist, for Benjamin, theory must strive to explicate "new values" attuned to the forces of modern life (*Will,* 509-19).

This tension between tradition and the avant-garde, between the mourning or the affirmation of the destruction of experience, has been termed "antinomic" by McCole (10), and is not resolved definitively within Benjamin's oeuvre.[175] However, as M. Berman stresses throughout his own analyses of Modernity, it is precisely such a dialectical ambivalence towards the destruction of tradition that defines the quintessentially "modern" attitude. With his modern incongruity, Benjamin enters into constellation with "Goethe, Marx, and Baudelaire," figures whom Berman has analyzed as characteristically "modern" (15-36). For Berman, these thinkers chart the crises wrought by modernization upon traditional forms of life, but in so doing, they also seek to provide models or methods by which humanity can become "truly modern" in an expanded and more inclusive sense: "to get a grip on the modern world and make themselves at home in it" (5).

Finally, with such an ambiguity, Benjamin enters into constellation with Hegel, perhaps the first philosopher of modern life, who with his concept of "*Aufhebung*" [sublation], elevates the contradictory affect of Modernity to the level of the concept (*EL,* 128-31). As Schulte-Sasse suggests, Hegel's *PS,* can be seen as the first example of a "cultural studies," inventing a framework for cultural reflection that will later be employed by thinkers such as Simmel (7). In this manner, Hegel can be seen as a theorist who develops new (self-critical) epistemic-assimilative practices to chart the plethora of

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[175] McCole sees Benjamin as a thinker of crisis, one who attempted to theorize experience in Modernity: "an epochal upheaval in the organization of the human sensorium, [in] the very structure of perception and experience" (1). As such, Benjamin antinomically "celebrates and mourns, by turns, the liquidation of tradition" (McCole, 8). Describing Benjamin's experimental and antinomic relationship to tradition, McCole writes: "His seeming ambivalence was not mere oscillation but, rather, an ongoing experiment: in allowing perspectives usually juxtaposed as 'radical' and 'conservative,' 'enlightened' and 'traditionalist,' converge in his work, he challenged the accepted paradigms of cultural criticism. His work constructs and explores the antinomies of a tradition understood as being in decay, antinomies whose force had emerged in the concrete historical situation of interwar Europe" (10). Such a doubled engagement, "crystalized [Benjamin's] awareness of the antinomies of tradition," a perspective which allowed him "to listen attentively to tradition without letting it bind him" (McCole, 18, 21). Because of Benjamin's contradictory relation to the tradition, McCole argues that approaching Benjamin requires "a special kind of historical reading" (28), which is attuned to the "productive ambivalence about the decay of tradition [and] the dialectic of liquidationist and culturally conservative moments in his work" (28).

new modern forms of life (Schulte-Sasse, 80, 85-9). Following Benjamin and Hegel, Modern thought demands an embrace of tension and contradiction, a learning to be (not) at home with paradox.

### 3.3.3 Benjamin's Philosophy of Technology: Understanding Mediation and the Extensions of (so-called) Man

*"That our human senses, of which all media are extensions, are also fixed charges on our personal energies, and that they also configure the awareness and experience of each one of us." McLuhan, Understanding Media, 35.*

In the various formulations of his essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility" (1936/9), Benjamin develops his theses regarding the "formulation of revolutionary demands in the politics of art" (*SW* 4: 252), alongside a latent historical theory of perception, which charts the natural-historical organization of the human sensorium. In this manner, the majority of Benjamin's theses regarding the decay of "the Aura" can also be read as describing the destruction of the individual at the hands of technological reproduction: charting the "substitu[tion] of a mass existence for a unique existence" (*SW 4:* 254), along with the vast alterations undergone by human perception at the hands of new media. Modern media have altered perception and existence irreversibly—while revealing new domains such as the "optical unconscious" (*SW 2:* 511-12)[176] –and art and aesthetics should play a key role in articulating and politicizing these new territories. Benjamin should be seen in a German lineage of thinkers of media(tion), including Hegel, Marx, Simmel, and F. Kittler, who take up the imperative to "understand media" by charting the natural-historical media networks "so-called-man" is enmeshed within (McLuhan, 23-35; Kittler, *Gramophone,* 1-19).[177]

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[176] Describing this new domain in relation to the photographs of K. Bloßfeldt and E. Muybridge, Benjamin writes, "It is through photography that we first discover the existence of this optical unconscious, just as we discover the instinctual unconscious through psychoanalysis" (*SW 2:* 510-12). According to Yacavone, "Through the camera eye, hitherto unseen dimensions of objects became visible for the first time," leading to an analogy with psychoanalysis, "both tools that systematically uncover previously hidden dimensions of human life" (39, see, 29, 38-40, 131). For more on the theoretical efficacy of Benjamin's notion, see Smith & Sliwinski, (Ed.), *Photography and the Optical Unconscious.*
[177] Kittler describes the anti-humanistic essence of his media theory in a manner reminiscent of Foucault's proclamations at the end of *The Order of Things* (387): "Media render Man, 'that sublime culprit in the most serenely spiritual sense' of his philosophy, superfluous" (*Gramophone,*78).

Latent in Benjamin's "Work of Art" essay is an operative "natural-historical" theory of perception, one which is materially shaped in a manner akin to art historical forms. As Benjamin writes: "Just as the entire mode of existence of human collectives changes over long historical periods, so too does their mode of perception. The way in which human perception is organized—the medium in which it occurs—is conditioned not only by nature but by history" (*SW* 4: 255). For Benjamin, one's perception and experience of the world are always already formally organized according to certain technologies or media, which facilitate one's relationship with the (natural) world: "our writing tools are also writing our thoughts" (Kittler, *Gramophone,* 200). Here Benjamin forms an affinity with other thinkers of media, namely McLuhan, for whom technology acts as an "extension of man," becoming a vanishing prosthesis to the human sensorium.[178] To illustrate such a technological supplementation, McLuhan reinterprets the myth of Narcissus to describe the numbing, or "narcotic," effect of technological prostheses: they at once extend, while simultaneously reducing, one's capacity for experience (51-66). For McLuhan, the media we employ place us in a position of subservience: we are conditioned by the various technologies and media we exist within, as the "medium" invariably shapes both the "message" and messenger (23). As McLuhan writes:

> To behold, use or perceive any extension of ourselves in technological form is necessarily to embrace it. To listen to radio or to read the printed page is to accept these extensions of ourselves into our personal system and to undergo the "closure" or displacement of perception that follows automatically. It is this continuous embrace of our own technology in daily use that puts us in the Narcissus role of subliminal awareness and numbness in relation to these images of ourselves. By continuously embracing technologies, we relate ourselves to them as servomechanisms. That is why we must, to use them at all, serve these objects, these extensions of ourselves, as gods or minor religions. An ~~Indian~~ is the servomechanism of his canoe, as the cowboy of his horse or the executive of his clock. (55, [*Sic*])[179]

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[178] Caygill has highlighted the "technological" character of experience in Benjamin's oeuvre, along with the new political imperatives issued by advances in technology, as he writes: "For Benjamin, all experience is technological. With this tremendous development of technology, a completely new poverty has descended on mankind. Experience always relates to a certain techné [including language]. The work of art essay demonstrates the two perspectives from which to view technology; either to be reactive—and cling to the aura (which is associated with Fascism), or to be progressive, and attempt to be modern (this is the communist option)" (94).

[179] Elsewhere in the text, McLuhan provides a reading of Baudelaire in a similar manner to these considerations, an interpretation which aligns with Benjamin's positioning of Baudelaire as a thinker of

As "servomechanisms" of various media one must strive to "understand media," coming to terms with the technological-historical organization of the human sensorium, along with the various systems of mediation within which one is perpetually embedded. Experience cannot be considered "natural," as some pure "given" sense datum of perception, nor can it be seen to simply conform to some innate table of categories; but rather, for Benjamin, experience must be understood in a natural-historical manner: as shaped by history, nature, media and technology. Benjamin's writings on media and modern life provide the groundwork for a speculative philosophy of technology, through which one can theorize regarding the role of history and technology in shaping experience and perception, while provoking a reflection into the various media one always already exists within. Much more remains to be said regarding Benjamin as a theorist of media and technology, particularly in constellation with other media intellectuals such as McLuhan and Kittler. As will be demonstrated in the next section, such a philosophy is grounded upon a mimetic understanding of the subject which continually seeks to extend and express itself through various media or "languages."

## 3.4 Benjamin's Philosophy of Language: From Nature to Language (and Back Again)

"The question regarding the essence of knowledge, law and art is linked to the question of the origins of all human expression of the intellect out of the substance of language." Benjamin, *BC,* 437.

Towards the end of his "Program," Benjamin describes a central task for his philosophy of the future as the development and reorientation of the Kantian transcendental program around an analysis of language (*SW 1:* 108; Stern, 34). Such an expanded philosophy of language, which comes to be understood as the transcendental condition of thought, allows Benjamin to systematically ground his expanded philosophy of experience. Benjamin's theory of language involves what Adorno has elsewhere termed an "axial shift" of Kant's "Copernican revolution" (*ND,* xx): a meta-critical

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urban experience. As McLuhan writes: "Baudelaire originally intended to call his *Fleurs du Mal, Les Limbes,* having in mind the city as corporate extensions of our physical organs. Our letting-go of ourselves, self-alienations, as it were, in order to amplify or increase the power of various functions. Baudelaire considered flowers to be growths of evil. The city as amplification of human lusts and sensual striving had for him an entire organic and psychic unity" (117).

movement away from the primacy Kant accords to "the subject" or "the transcendental unity of apperception," towards "the object," while not dispensing wholly with the subject's transcendental contributions to cognition. Benjamin moves the center of philosophical affect from the epistemic subject, outwards into the world, developing a fundamentally "expressive" understanding of reality in which human language is decentered into a particular manifestation of "language overall" [*überhaupt*] (*GS VII:* 785). In this way Benjamin is a mimetic thinker, one who seeks to encompass non-discursive "languages"—or media—within the purview of philosophy. One can see that Benjamin's meta-critical interventions upon the Kantian transcendental are in line with those undertaken by many in the post-Kantian generation, notably, Hegel and Schelling, who seek to expand the purview of philosophy to a broader range of experiences, while remaining committed to a systematic notion of philosophy. Benjamin's theory of language should be seen in line with Hegel's encyclopedia, or Schelling's organic form of thought: models of intellectual grounding capable of mediating a broader range of phenomena than permitted by Kant. In what follows, Benjamin's linguistic interventions upon the Kantian transcendental program will be elaborated (3.4.1), following which his theory of language (3.4.2), along with its mimetic relationship to the world (3.4.3), will be explored.

### 3.4.1 Kant and Language (Benjamin's Meta-critique)

> "A concept of knowledge gained from a reflection on the linguistic nature of language of knowledge will create a corresponding concept of experience which will also encompass realms that Kant failed to truly systematize." Benjamin, "Program," *SW 1:* 108.

In his "Program," Benjamin outlines three main critiques of the (Neo)-Kantian project: 1) the Newtonian scientific model of cognition that Kant develops destroys experience; 2) the epistemological subject-object division is reductive and inadequate; 3) Kant conflates "knowledge of experience," or its transcendental conditions, with experience itself (Stern, 33; *SW 1:* 100-8). Benjamin objects to a positivist "empiricist bias" operative within the Neo-Kantian program (and latent in Kant), one which sought to erect a scientific-mathematical model of philosophical certainty in a manner analogous to Newtonian mechanics. Further, Benjamin saw the upshot of the Kantian program as the reestablishment of an empiricist "subject-object" model of cognition, whereby

transcendental consciousness replaces the empirical ego as a recipient of external sensations (Stern, 35-37). As in empiricism, "knowledge"—understood as a refined, or "worked up," form of experience—is given primacy over transient "ephemeral experience" (*SW* 1: 108). Despite this, Benjamin praises Kant's tacit resistance to empiricism by way of his "thing-in-itself," in a manner akin to Adorno's "block" (*Kant,* 170-80). Though Benjamin insists that the Kantian subject must be decentered further: Kant's "tentative turn away from a conception of knowledge as a relation between subject and object must be radicalized" (Stern, 37). Benjamin undertakes such a task by moving the locus of knowledge from consciousness to language: that "sphere of total neutrality between subject and object" (*SW 1:* 108). Language is understood as "neutral" with respect to both subject and object: it does not reside in some mystical communion with the essence of things (the object), nor is it "the expression of some fundamental subjective structure or grammar" (*SW 1:* 104). Instead, human language ("*die Sprache des Menschen*") is a particular manifestation, or translation, of "language as such" ("*Sprache überhaupt*"): of the polyphony of expressions (or media) permeating the world.[180]

Benjamin reorients the epistemic subject's position with respect to the world: understanding language as "first philosophy," or recognizing the primacy of "mediation," identifies the fundamentally interstitial nature of all human constructions in relation to the world. Put more radically, the world itself elicits forms of signification: "Meaning...is not projected onto the world by human language, but is a precondition for it" (Stern, 39). This is not to say that Benjamin lapses into some uncritical pantheism, or mystical night of the intuition, but rather, the uniqueness of Benjamin's project lies in his maintenance

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[180] As is evident by the opening of "On Language as Such," Benjamin considers language in an expanded sense, beyond the mere employment of words and discourse; instead language is understood in terms of "expression," which permeates both the world and human language. As Benjamin writes, "It is possible to talk about a language of music and of sculpture, about a language of justice...The existence of language...is coextensive not only with human mental expression...but with absolutely everything" (*SW 1:* 62). Describing Benjamin's expressive linguistic universalism, Stern will write: "Benjamin is using the word 'language' to apply to practices and experiences that communicate meanings, whether or not these meanings are subsequently communicated or fully communicable in words" (32), and further, "Language is an all-encompassing medium of expression—it is meaning *as such,* or what is sometimes called being." (13). Such an expressive understanding of language was formalized in the writings of Hamann and Herder, thinkers who, generally stated, sought to undertake a meta-critique of the Kantian program in a manner that anticipated the absolute Idealism of Hegel and Schelling (Stern, 18, 29-55).

of language as a transcendental structure of thought. If Kant inquired after the transcendental conditions of an assumed scientific model of cognition, Benjamin moves beyond such an atomistic subject-object epistemology to a model which understands language as perpetually mediating one's relationship with reality, and as such, language must serve as the transcendental condition for any interaction with the world. Fenves sees Benjamin's employment of language as in line with Kant's "Transcendental Aesthetic," which presents space and time as *a priori* subjective intuitions structuring perception of reality (137-8). Language remains transcendental given that it is the medium or form of expression, through which all experience is given the to the ("so-called") human (Kittler, *Gramophone,* xxxix). Given the central role Benjamin accords to translation, it must further be granted that any expression—human or otherwise (*SW* 1: 73)—can be translated (or mediated) into human language, such that language can express, "absolutely everything" (*SW 1*: 62). In such a manner, Benjamin's understanding of language allows for an expansive, though nonetheless transcendental, philosophy of experience.

### 3.4.2 "On Language as Such and the Language of Man": Benjamin's Linguistic Philosophy

> "A main source of failure to understand is that we don't have *an overview* [*Übersehen*] of the use of our words. –Our grammar is deficient in survey-ability [*Übersichtlichkeit*]." Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 54.

Benjamin outlines the main contours of his philosophy of language in "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man" (*Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen,*" 1916), a text originally composed as a letter to Scholem intending to parse the relationship between mathematics and language.[181] The finished text seldom mentions mathematics, and when it does only obliquely (Fenves, 143-51), and instead should be read as a quasi-mystical thought experiment into the origins of language, one following the post-Kantian "meta-critiques" of thinkers such as Hamann and Herder (Stern, 99, 141-3). Benjamin describes the "essay's" aim to Scholem: "I try to address the problem of the essence of language in this work, particularly in an immanent

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[181] "*Sprache überhaupt*" (*GS VII:* 785): can be rendered as "language as such, in general, or overall, or as "pure language" in the parlance of "The Task of the Translator" (see Stern, 32).

connection to Judaism, as far as I understand it, and the first chapter of Genesis" (*BC,* 81). Given the origin of the text in a letter to Scholem, a thinker with whom Benjamin often discussed Judaic religious matters, Benjamin couches much of the argument in explicitly theological terms via his reading of Genesis, with an emphasis on an Adamic theory of names.[182] Further, the central importance of translation or the mediation between media must be underscored: Benjamin develops an understanding of language which expresses the mediations between different levels of signification—between "divine language," Adamic "naming language," and "the language of man," and (latently) the "ur-signification" of nature— such that a theory of translation emerges "at the deepest level of linguistic theory" (*SW* 1: 69). In this way, it is necessary to read Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator" ("*Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers,*"1923) in conjunction with "On Language," seeing them as working out of a shared linguistic philosophy. Motifs from both texts are later re-cited in his "Epistemo-Critical Prologue" which sought to crystalize his early views (*OT,* 13-15, 26, 244, 256). The remainder of this section will undertake a critical exegesis of Benjamin's philosophy of language, with particular reference to the modified understanding of structure or form which grounds Benjamin's expanded philosophy of experience.[183]

Benjamin's "On Language as Such" questions the correspondences between "language as such" [*Sprache überhaupt*] and "the language of man" [*die Sprache des Menschen*]. The work stages a lapsarian narrative of "the fall" from the immanence of divine language in "Eden," into the "prattle" of everyday designative usage, degenerating

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[182] Jacobson has emphasized the theological dimensions of Benjamin's text, situating him in relation to Jewish thought, specifically a notion of "*Bereshit Rabbah,*" which sees language and the Torah existing prior to creation as "God's notepad" (85), out of which creation flowed. As Benjamin asserts in the essay, "Language is therefore the creative and finished creation" (*SW 1:* 68). For more on the relationship between theology and Benjamin's theory of language see, Ch. 3. "On the Origins of Language" in Jacobson, *Metaphysics of the Profane* (85-122). Opposed to Jacobson's perspective, Stern sees Benjamin's employment of theology as a heuristic thought experiment by which to express his argument (25). Benjamin describes his theological-Adamic understanding of names as follows: "The proper name is the communion of man with the *creative* word of God" (*SW 1:* 69).

[183] Stern positions Benjamin's theory of language as grounding much of his other work: "As remains underappreciated, Benjamin's theory of language stands at the foundation of his later analysis of bourgeois material culture. In particular, his famous writings on Goethe, Baudelaire, Kafka, and Leskov; his criticisms of journalistic language in his essay on Karl Kraus and in the *Arcades Project*; his characterizations of the media photography and film, all depend conceptually on his early characterizations of language and the role of criticism" (23).

further into the "bourgeois conception of language" that sees words in an arbitrary relationship to things (*SW* 1: 71, 65). Following the Genesis narrative: in the beginning, God (as divine "logos") spoke and created the world, after which, Adam ("the first philosopher") was tasked with the weak messianic duty of naming creation (*SW 1:* 70). Following the expulsion from Eden and the failed attempt at Babel, God "ma[de] language mediate" (*SW 1:*72).

Benjamin describes his univocal understanding of language: "Every expression of human mental life [*Geisteslebens*] can be understood as a kind of language"; there exists a "language of music, sculpture, justice," all of which tend "toward the communication of objects of the mind" (*SW* 1: 62; *GS II:* 140).[184] Discursive conceptual language, which is typically interrogated by philosophy of language, is usurped from its primary position, being considered but one particular "language" or instantiation of "language as such." Benjamin further describes the expressions of the natural world as a form of "language": "there is no event or thing in either animate or inanimate nature that does not in some way partake of language, for it is the nature of each one to communicate its mental contents" (*SW* 1: 62). In this regard, Benjamin continues the Hamannian project of demonstrating "the presence of language everywhere," formulating his own model of "linguistic universalism" (*SW 1:*108; Stern, 37).[185] Such an "expressive" understanding of reality, in which the human subject is usurped from its privileged position, has much in common with the absolute Idealism of thinkers such as Hegel and Schelling, who consider subjective human reason as a particular moment within a broader rational continuum.

Benjamin further postulates that latent in the human denotative naming capacity lies a spark of originary divine logos, which continues to glimmer amidst the fallen

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[184] Livingstone translates, "*Geisteslebens*" as "mental life," which is apt, though inadequate given the difficulty of translating "Geist," which connotes at once, mind, spirit, ghost, and intellect. For more on the complicated histories of this term—along with the impossibility of avoiding its Idealist lineages—see Derrida, *Of Spirit,* 1-7. This term will be discussed in more depth (with specific relation to Hegel) in the final chapter of this project.

[185] Differentiating Benjamin's approach from that of the conventional philosophy of language, Stern writes: "Benjamin will answer the question of how words refer to objects not by trying to explain how the gap between word and object is bridged, but by explaining how the gap is created by human language in the first place" (31).

context of earthly signification. After its "fall" from Eden, humanity has lost its proximate mimetic relationship with God, nature, and language, and is perpetually ensnared by a mediated relationship to the world. In a typical Benjaminian reversal, the fall becomes unexpectedly fortunate: "The fall is the birth hour of the human word, in which the name no longer lives uninjured, [in] which [language] steps out of naming-language, out of its own knowing, immanent magic, in order to become explicitly from the outside as it were, magic. The word must communicate something (other than itself)" (*SW* 1: 71).[186] There will be no return to the purity of divine logos, nor to the immediate signification of Adam; one is rather condemned to existence within the various media that constitute "the language of man." However, in a Judaic theological about-face, Benjamin shows how through seemingly minor practices of translation or criticism, one can recover something of the original divine signifying intention, re-enchanting the "prattle" of empty signification.

For Benjamin, human language is fundamentally decentered, becoming one among many communicative mediums. Though all entities in nature "express" themselves by communicating their "linguistic being," Benjamin emphasizes that "It is...the linguistic being of man to name things" (*SW* 1: 64). It is the task of the human to actualize the world through language, as Adam "called each thing by its right name," which is "that through which, and in which, language itself communicates itself absolutely" (*SW 1*: 65). Humans possess the "weak-messianic" power of language, which directly descends from the divine spark of creation, and are thus able to participate in the broader continuum of "expressions."

In such a manner, Benjamin defines language as the "expression" of the "spiritual" elements of the mind, though this should not be taken to mean that "words" encompass some independent "thing" as in what Benjamin terms the "Bourgeois

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[186] Describing Benjamin's allegory of "the fall," Stern writes: "The fall represents the beginning of an external perspective on language, which is the requirement for an external perspective on the world. This is humanity coming into its own, stepping outside of the immanent language that connected it to things and animals and making it capable of judgment" (74). After the linguistic fall from such an immediate prose of the world, the "judging" power of the word arises, as humans are condemned to a designative, external, or "bourgeois," conception of language. Read allegorically, Benjamin's "fall" has always already occurred given that we, as thinkers of language, commence within a designative understanding of language from which one must extricate oneself in order to gain insight into the expressive understanding of language.

conception of language" (*SW 1:* 65).[187] Instead, for Benjamin, the "spiritual content,"
which is expressed by language, is already elicited by the object and the world in general.
Benjamin's starting point differs radically from conventional ("bourgeois") philosophies
of language, which begin with a distinction between "word" and "thing," following
which they attempt to solve problematics of "designation," or determine how the sign
arbitrarily relates to the object it signifies. Benjamin further contrasts his own theory with
mystical understandings of language, in which language grasps the thing-in-itself, or "the
mental essence of a thing" (*SW* 1: 63).  Against Saussure—thus also contravening much
of the resulting tradition of French theory which utilized his work—Benjamin will assert,
"language never gives mere signs" (*SW 1:* 69): language is not arbitrary, but rather, has
an immanent and mimetic relationship with the object it signifies.[188]

　　For Benjamin, one must move beyond both the "bourgeois" designative
understanding of language, and mystical views of language as the communion of word
and thing. Philosophy must awaken to the presence of "expression" and language
everywhere: one exists perpetually within a context of mediation, within various media or
"discourse networks" (Kittler, *Discourse,* 369-72). Benjamin eradicates any hard
distinction between "word" and "thing," along with that between "mental" and "linguistic
being," in favour of a more general understanding of language as "expression."
Describing this, Benjamin writes:

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[187] The Bourgeois, or designative, understanding of language, sees words in an arbitrary or fiat relationship
to its object. Benjamin likewise moves against the "mystical understanding of language," in which the word
fully expresses the "essence of a thing": "The view that the mental essence of a thing consists precisely in
its language—this view, taken as a hypothesis, is the great abyss into which all linguistic theory threatens to
fall, and to survive precisely suspended over this abyss is its task" (*SW 1:* 63). It should be noted that
Benjamin does not wholly reject the mystical understanding of language, given that he maintains language
is an expression of divine creativity, which also subsists in objects. To follow Benjamin on language, one
must remain "suspended above the abyss," understanding the mystical origin of language without fully
lapsing into irrationalism.

[188] Weber pushes Benjamin in the direction of deconstruction, with particular emphasis on Derrida's notion
of "iterability" (from "Signature Event Context," 1971/1988), in which language—instead of directly
corresponding to the world—marks a repetition, or "re-iteration" of the context of meaning, inscribing a
fundamental difference (or *différance*) between word and thing (Derrida, 315). As such, Weber's sees
Benjamin's texts as the radicalization of this difference, or "extreme," between word and thing, with
meaning coming to be based upon a certain "coming to pass," a natural historical transience constitutive of
philosophy (5-10). Though there are evident affinities between Benjamin and deconstruction (as is
illustrated by de Man's work) my own reading of Benjamin as a theorist of translation and mimesis pushes
against such a deconstructive recuperation of Benjamin. For de Man's reading of Benjamin as a theorist of
translation, see "Conclusions" (73-105).

> It is fundamental that this mental being communicates itself *in* language and not *through* language. Languages, therefore have no speaker, if this means someone who communicates *through* these languages…Mental being is identical with linguistic being only insofar as it is capable of communication. What is communicable in a mental entity is its linguistic entity. (*SW* 1: 63)

Benjamin elaborates this expressive form elsewhere in the essay, contending "there is no such thing as a content of language" (*SW 1:* 66): the medium of language itself is the message. One exists "*in* language" and media, which are not simpl*y* neutral tools "*through*" which meaning is transmitted. Given that, "all language communicates itself *in* itself; it is in the purest sense the 'medium' of the communication," Benjamin reorients linguistic theory towards an analysis of mediation (*SW 1:* 66, 69). Linguistic philosophy studies the role played by the media in conditioning and shaping expression: "mediation, which is the immediacy of all mental communication, is the fundamental problem of linguistic theory" (*SW* 1: 64).[189] For Benjamin, philosophy of language becomes the analysis of the various languages, or media, humans find themselves embedded within, along with the possibility of translating between such domains.

### 3.4.3 Translation & Mimesis

"Fragments of a vessel that are glued together must match one another in the smallest details, although they need not be like one another." Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," *SW 1:* 260.

Benjamin's "expressive" understanding of reality, whereby human language is considered another language among many, places a new importance on translation as a technique of mediation between different levels of signification. As Benjamin writes, "It is necessary to found the concept of translation at the deepest level of linguistic theory, for it is much too far-reaching and powerful to be treated in any way as an afterthought" (*SW* 1: 69). In "On Language," Benjamin describes various spheres of signification, or "languages," as "media of varying densities" (*SW* 1: 71). Human language, via particular

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[189] In this way, the distinction between form and content, or language and mental essence, is collapsed by Benjamin, as the two polarities come to be seen as separated from each other by a "nothingness." As Benjamin writes: "Language is thus the mental being of things. Mental being is therefore postulated at the outset as communicable, or, rather, is situated *within* the communicable, and the thesis that the linguistic being of things is identical with the mental, insofar as the latter is communicable, becomes in its 'insofar' a tautology. There is no such thing as a content of language; as communication, language communicates a mental activity—something communicable per say" (*SW 1:* 66).

"naming" practices, attempts to translate the "mute" language of nature into "the sonic" language of the human: "The language of things can pass into the language of knowledge and name only through translation —so many translations, so many languages—once man has fallen from the paradisiacal state that knew only one language" (*SW 1:* 70-71). After the linguistic fall from the immediacy of divine logos, there can be no return to the world before Babel: one is predestined to translate between the vast array of media that make up the continuum of "language." For Benjamin, through such immanent practices of mediation one is able to glimpse a refracted image of "language as such."

Latent in Benjamin's descriptions of language as translation is a mimetic understanding of language as the "archive of non-sensuous similarities"; that is, language manifests "the highest level of mimetic behavior," participating in the "mimetic faculty" of the human (*SW 2:* 722; 697).[190] Describing the existence of this mimetic faculty, along with a primordial imitative comportment to the world, Benjamin writes: "Nature produces similarities—one need only think of mimicry. The very greatest capacity for the generation of similarities, however, belongs to human beings. Indeed, there may be no single one of their higher functions that is not codetermined by the mimetic faculty" (*SW 2:* 694). Such an originary mimetic relationship to the world subtends human "naming power," providing Benjamin with a primordial comportment to the expressive character of the world. Linguistic acts of "naming" translate the pre-linguistic expressions of the world into language. In the "Mimetic Faculty," Benjamin takes up Rudolf Leonard's claim, "Every word—and the whole of language... is onomatopoetic" (*SW 2:* 721), speculatively locating the origin of language in prehistoric mimetic comportments and gestures.[191]

Language must be understood as a form of translation: both of the original expression of the "object" into the "word," and in between differing media. One can see

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[190] A. Rabinbach has noted that Benjamin's reflections on language are continued seventeen years after "On Language" in two similar texts dealing with the human "mimetic faculty": "On the Mimetic Faculty" and "Doctrine of the Similar" (both 1933) (60).

[191] Elaborating the mimetic origin of language—in which language descends from earlier onomatopoetic "languages"—Benjamin writes, "from time immemorial, the mimetic faculty has been conceded some influence on language." And further, "imitative behavior in Language formation was acknowledged under the name of onomatopoeia" (*SW 2:* 721).

the progressive translation of "language"—from that of nature to that of the human—as part of a broader unfolding that makes up the continuum of "language as such." As Benjamin writes, "There is a language of sculpture, of painting, of poetry…we are concerned here with nameless non-acoustic languages, languages issuing from matter... we should recall the material community of things in their communication" (*SW* 1: 73). As I have emphasized, such a mimetic understanding of language is particularly efficacious in the constellation of media theory, allowing the "languages" of media and technology to be charted and understood. Stern underscores the radical nature of Benjamin's mimetic-linguistic reversal: "Language begins as an immanent, mimetic attempt to give voice to the meaning communicated by nature and not as a way of referring to objects" (57). That is, language is not arbitrary, and should be seen in an immanent constellation with domains such as dance, incantation, and astrology, spheres which foreground an originary mimetic species being, along with an animistic-pantheistic understanding of reality. More radically, within such a schema conceptual language represents a further abstraction from more immediate forms of mimetic interaction with the world.[192]

Such media philosophical lines of thinking are continued in Benjamin's reflections on translation, specifically his 1923 preface to his translations of Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens,* "The Task of the Translator." Here Benjamin argues that in translation, thought as a historically informed practice, one glimpses something of "pure language," or "language overall" (*SW 1:* 261-2). That is, all translation passes through, and contributes to, the larger mosaic that is "language as such." While the poet or author intends towards communication *within* a given epoch, and sees language as *a means* to

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[192] Benjamin describes his own form of "mimetic criticism" as an attempt "to read what was never written...reading prior to languages, from entrails, the stars, or dances" (*SW 2:* 722). Through such a "profane and magical" sense of reading, one is able to glimpse the mimetic basis of language as it "flashes up" and "flits by" (*SW 2:* 695- 696). The motif of "the flash," or "shock of illumination," occurs throughout Benjamin's oeuvre, notably in his writings on photography, along with the flash of historical illumination throughout the *Arcades Project,* and his 1940, "Theses on the Concept of History." Describing the "flashing up" through which one perceives mimetic constellations, Benjamin will write: "The perception of similarity is in every case bound to a flashing up. It flits past, can possibly be won again, but cannot really be held fast as can other perceptions. It offers itself to the eye as fleetingly and transitorily as a constellation of stars. The perception of similarities thus seems to be bound to a moment in time" (*SW 2:* 695).

communication, the translator aims at "something other than the reproduction of meaning" (*SW 1:* 259). The translator reflects on questions of mediation, or the translation of language across history, and therein previews something of "pure language": "to regain pure language fully formed from the linguistic flux, is the tremendous and only capacity of translation" (*SW 1:* 261). This "pure language" is not some static perfect language independent of history, but rather, language crafted through historical reflection and linguistic criticism, the "ripening the seed of pure language in a translation" (*SW 1:* 259). The translator (and perhaps the critic) is one who historically re-creates "language as such" after the fall. Alluding to this historical production of "pure language," Benjamin writes:

> And that which seeks to represent, indeed to produce, itself in the evolving of languages is that very nucleus of the pure language; yet though this nucleus remains present in life as that which is symbolized itself, albeit hidden and fragmentary, it persists in linguistic creations only in its symbolizing capacity. (*SW 1:* 261)

Though fragmentary in themselves, individual acts of translation and criticism participate in the broader constellation that is "pure language." Such sentiments are echoed in Benjamin's 1921/39 "Theologico-Political Fragment," which describes the image of the messiah as mirrored in the eternal transience of nature. Human intention, by striving after the "eternal passing" or the transience that is "nature," gains a fragmentary image of "happiness," seeing an imagine of "the divine" refracted in the eternal passing of the "profane" (*SW 3:* 305-6). Such a negative theology can likewise be seen as subtending the relationship between "language as such" and the "language of man": the perpetual translation (or "translatability") of the "language of man," shoots beyond itself, refracting an image of "language as such" in the perpetual progression of works and translations. In concluding his 1916 "On Language," Benjamin re-articulates the various levels of signification described throughout the essay—from the creative word of God, through to the "unspoken language of nature"—all of which make up the mosaic that is "Language as such":

> Man communicates himself to God through name, which he gives to nature and (in proper names) to his own kind; and to nature he gives names according to the communication he receives from her, for the whole of nature is imbued with a nameless, unspoken language, the residue of the creative word of God, which is preserved in man as the cognizing name and above man as the judgment suspended over him. The language of nature is comparable to a secret password that each

sentry passes to the next in his own language, but the meaning of the password is the sentry's language itself. All higher language is a translation of lower ones, until in ultimate clarity the word of God unfolds, which is the unity of this movement made up of language. (*SW* 1: 74)[193]

The mute language of nature, in its transient resistance to signification, projects a kaleidoscopic image of the unfolding of divine language. Such a negative theological reversal again echoes Benjamin's "Fragment," which sees transience as dialectically mirroring its opposite, transcendence (*SW 3:* 306). Put allegorically: after the linguistic "fall" into a disenchanted relationship with the natural world, one cannot go back to Eden, nor hope to "re-awaken the charnel house of rotted interiors" through some messianic gesture (Lukács, *Novel,* 64). Instead, for Benjamin, one must embrace such ephemerality, becoming attentive to the mute and sensuous language of nature. With his expressive understanding of language and reality, Benjamin puts "meaning back into the world" (Stern, 3), though not in an affirmative sense, as nature stands as testament to an ur- history of transience: a monument to the primacy of ephemerality over and against the system or table of categories. To follow Schelling, Benjamin reconnects the philosophy of language with its "living ground" (*FE,* 26), theorizing language and nature in an immanent expressive continuum. Benjamin's thought can be described as an originary listening to the world, an understanding of the tenuous, evanescent, and natural-historical character of all human constructions. It is such a negative theological metaphysics which subtends Benjamin's reflections on language, and, as I will argue in the following chapter (4.3.3), his understanding of allegory.

Scholarship has rightly analyzed the linguistic arguments made by Benjamin in "On Language." However, such analyses have come at the expense of a thorough consideration of the metaphysical underpinnings of Benjamin's thinking (on language). Benjamin develops a "natural-historical" metaphysics of impermanence, what Hansen has termed an "ur-history of change" (3): the recognition of the primacy of transformation with respect to both nature and history (Adorno, *NH*, 252-3). Describing

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[193] Describing the reversal in which "pure meaning (or language)" is glimpsed through the act of translation, Stern writes: "Pure meaning is an ideal that we never reach. Still, in the act of translations— movement through the medium of language as such—we are provided a partial glimpse of the totality from which individual words are fallen" (66).

nature's transient lamentation Benjamin writes, "It is a metaphysical truth that all nature would begin to lament if it where endowed with language" (*SW 1:* 72), and further, "Because she is mute, nature mourns" (*SW 1:* 73). In a primary sense one can see Benjamin positing an expressive, or "communicable," element to the world, an original animism which the language of Adam first represented in "naming."[194] In a related second sense, Benjamin figures the primacy of an ephemeral image of nature: a world that is perpetually in flux, hence does not respect the stability of origins or signification. In such a way, nature "mourns" the inadequacy of language to express its originary transience, upholding the supremacy of change against any system of signification. Further, the "language of man" contains within itself a translated fragment of fallen nature, a further level of mediation in the broader kaleidoscope that is "language."

## 3.5    Synthesis: Language and the Limits of Experience

"The world is my world: this is manifest in the fact that the limits of language (of that language which alone I understand) mean the limits of my world." Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus,* 5.62.

Benjamin's understanding of language provides an expanded, though nonetheless transcendental, grounding for his expanded philosophy of experience. As opposed to the rigid (Neo) Kantian limitation of experience by way of knowledge (to its "possibility"), Benjamin favors a more porous model of reason, which experimentally unbinds the empirical and transcendental domains, bestowing upon experience the ability to shape the philosophical system. Benjamin is highly critical of thinkers who attempt to limit the scope of philosophy to human language (as in the prefatory remark by Wittgenstein), or to a transcendental table or grammar (as Kant). Against such positions, Benjamin will assert that language—when considered as the progressive unfolding or translation of

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[194] Statements such as "language communicates the linguistic being of things" (*SW 1:* 63) evoke the peculiar pantheism animating much of Benjamin's early work (in the sense of Schelling and Spinoza). Benjamin accords an original agency to the world, which expresses itself for language. Describing the need to "translate" the significations of nature into language, Benjamin writes: "The translation of the language of things into that of man is not only a translation of the mute into the sonic; it is also the translation of nameless into name" (*SW 1:* 70). Likewise, Benjamin speaks of the "life" of the work in relation to translation, criticism, and other modes of supplementary reception: "Commentary and translation stand in the same relation to the text as style and mimesis to nature: the same phenomenon considered from different aspects" (*SW* 1: 449).

different languages—is "potentially infinite," containing the capacity to express "absolutely everything" (*SW 1:* 62).

      "System" should not attempt to reify experience, or express it in some definitive manner, but rather, should become a technique of mediation that arranges elements into a diversity of thought images and constellations. Structure should be seen in a medial relationship of translation to both experience and the world, not as some static domain of final meaning. Benjamin installs a structural openness between the transcendental and empirical domains, as experience is allowed to continually invade structure, forcing it to re-constellate its coordinates. As such, philosophy should no longer be understood as the a-historical deduction of fundamental truths or categories, but rather, as a fundamentally historical practice which constantly reconsiders itself according to new experiences. Practices such as translation and aesthetics, along with the immanent practice of critique, gain a new importance as techniques which are able to mediate and group disparate phenomena into new constellations. [195] In presenting the antinomy between "experience" and system (or language), this chapter has laid the groundwork for a fuller presentation of Benjamin's mortuary Romantic model of philosophy as criticism, along with a fuller appreciation of the metaphysical underpinnings of such a view.

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[195] Describing the primacy of aesthetics in Benjamin's relation to language, Stern will write: "Benjamin's idea that human language is the product of the translation of the language of experience entails the primacy of poetic language and mimesis—an idea that has a long history in the expressivist and Romantic traditions" (19). Stern also positions Benjamin against thinkers such as Habermas, who employ a designative- Kantian understanding of language (and "communication") as a universal human rational capacity. For, Benjamin, if language is only considered in terms of discourse—failing to understand the polyphony of expressions permeating the world—it cannot be considered "rational" in any meaningful sense. As Stern writes, "As long as our language itself is reified, euphemized, and bereft, its rational deployment in consenting discursive communities will remain uncritical" (Stern, 23). Finally, Stern emphasizes the differing relationships to the world that Benjamin's linguistic philosophy allows: "it can take up meaning, move it from place to place, and thereby allow the world to shine light on itself, to create connections. Language appears here not as a tool that maps, represents, or pictures the world, but one that gives more articulate, well-defined form to its extant meaning. Language brings the world to expression" (Stern, 62).

# 4    *Benjamin's Mortuary Philosophy: Towards a Natural History of Transience*

"That most paradoxical, most fleeting hope finally emerges from the semblance of reconciliation, just as, at twilight, as the sun is extinguished, rises the evening star which outlasts the night." Benjamin, "Goethe's Elective Affinities," *SW 1:* 355.

## 4.1    Critique (Against Epistemology)

"Philosophy defined by Kant as 'the science of the limitations of reasons!!'" Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 247.

In the previous chapter Benjamin's antinomy between "system," understood in relation to language, and "experience" was presented. In this chapter, I will explore how this dichotomy is problematized and expanded into a more capacious "metaphysical-critical" understanding of philosophy beyond the confines of mere epistemology. Benjamin came to post-Kantian Idealism out of his desire to expand the Kantian program by way of a broader array of experiences, though he eventually jettisoned such a (neo)Kantian framework in favor of a broader Idealist-Romantic metaphysics. Such a philosophy culminates in Benjamin's metaphysical doctrine of "natural history," which postulates the primacy of transience against a-historical conceptions of philosophy. I will demonstrate how such a mortuary notion of philosophy is immanently developed throughout Benjamin's 1919-20 dissertation, "The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism" [*Der Begriff der Kuntskritik in der deutschen Romantik*], his 1919-22 analysis of Goethe's *Elective Affinities* [*Wahlverwandtschaften*, published 1924-5]*,* culminating in his 1925/8, *Origin of the German Trauerspiel* [*Ursprung des deutschens Trauerspiels*]. Within these texts Benjamin enters the post-Kantian "force-field" of concerns (encompassing both "Idealism" and "Romanticism"), in or order to pursue his expanded conception of philosophy. In addition to seeing these texts as working out a novel understanding of "philosophy as criticism"—by way of Goethe and the *Frühromantiker*— I read this constellation of texts as ciphers to Benjamin's emergent metaphysical views. As the thinkers of the post-Kantian paradigm (re)turned to metaphysics in order to escape the aporias that arose from Kant's "subjective Idealism," Benjamin likewise immersed himself in post-Kantian metaphysics to formulate his own expanded understanding of philosophy beyond the limited purview of Neo-Kantianism. Within the mosaic of post-Kantian thought, Benjamin problematizes his original antinomy between "experience" and "language" within a broader metaphysical-critical

framework provided by the Romantic-Idealist sphere of concerns, according a greater importance to the aesthetic domain (and the practice of "criticism"), along with the metaphysical doctrine of "natural history." Benjamin's notion of "allegory" (in the *Trauerspiel*) will be read as central to his own mortuary vision of Romanticism: a notion which affirms a metaphysics of transience, while providing a historically informed model of signification in line with such a metaphysic.

This first section examines how Benjamin's philosophy of criticism emerges from within the epistemological tensions of the (neo)-Kantian program, specifically by way of his movement towards Romantic-Idealist "meta-critique" (Beiser, *Reason,* 4-8), or the immanent criticism of philosophy according to its own logic(s) or suppositions (4.1). My second section examines the metaphysical underpinnings of Benjamin's philosophy of criticism, analyzing the "contagion" of philosophy by organic nature, placing Benjamin in dialogue with Schelling and Goethe (4.2). My final section examines Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* book via a reading of the notions of "natural history" and "allegory" therein (4.3). These ideas will be presented as fundamental to Benjamin's "metaphysical-critical" philosophy of transience, or his mortuary vision of Romanticism.

### 4.1.1 Romantic Meta-Critique: From Kant to the "Force-Field" of Romanticism

> "Everywhere we seek the absolute, and we find only things." Novalis,
> *Miscellaneous Remarks,* 383.

Throughout 1917-18 while authoring his youthful programmatic statements for a "coming philosophy," Benjamin was also in search of a topic on which to write a dissertation (at the University of Bern). Such a research program necessitated a forced rapprochement between his personal intellectual interests and the academic discourse of the university, a struggle which persisted throughout much of his life, and which was never finally resolved. Benjamin's peripatetic relation to the university has affinities with that of Schelling, and to some extent Hegel (prior to his 1818 Berlin appointment), though Benjamin never habilitated, nor did he gain a university position. In line with his Kantian inclined "Program" (1918), Benjamin intended to think through Kant's conception of history—by way of the Kantian notion of the "eternal task" (*BC,* 119)— which he would position in relation to his own understanding of "historical experience," providing a potential starting point for a historically viable epistemology. However, after

actually reading Kant's essays "On Perpetual Peace" and the "Idea for a Universal History" in preparation for his dissertation, Benjamin abandoned the explicitly Kantian focus of the project. In rejecting Kant, Benjamin turned to a darkened vision of enlightenment, one which eventually culminated in his own melancholy natural historical vision. To Scholem, he expressed his "disappointment" (*BC,* 105-6) with Kant's passive notions of spectatorship, along with the "ethical interest" of his philosophy of history, going so far as to deride Kant as a "despot of *Logos,*" declaring Kant to be his "greatest adversary" (*BC,* 125, 103-4, 105-6). Crystalizing his frustrations with Kant's lack of historical sense in a letter to Scholem, Benjamin remarks, "It is virtually impossible to gain access to the philosophy of history using Kant's historical writings as a point of departure" (*BC,* 116). Despite his earlier attempts to expand Kantian epistemology, its lack of historical sensibility led Benjamin to look beyond the Kantian purview for solutions, marking his entrance into the Romantic-Idealist, post-Kantian fold.

In criticizing Kant, Benjamin gravitated towards the "force- field" (Adorno, *Kant,* 4) of post-Kantian thought encompassing both Idealism and Romanticism; however—particularly in his analysis of the Early Romantics—Benjamin maintained a modified Kantian formal model of analysis (Caygill, 34), though one creatively fractured by way of a Romantic hermeneutic. Benjamin engaged with the *Frühromantik Athenaeum* journal (1798-1800), along with the writings of Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis—in particular the former's 1804-6 "Windischmann Lectures"—in order to elaborate the "true nature of Romanticism of which the secondary literature is completely ignorant...i.e. messianism" (*BC,* 139). According to Benjamin, this "true nature" is its historical-critical sentiment, along with the "systematic fundamental idea" (*BC,* 137) of *Frühromantik* "mystical cognition" (*BC*, 136), both of which would provide a more robust framework for Benjamin's own encompassing philosophy of experience. Benjamin's 1919 dissertation, "On the Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism," should be seen as striving to more rigorously cast his early "program" for philosophy—which sought to enlarge the purview of philosophy into language and experience—into a more substantive philosophy of criticism, one able to mediate experiences from domains such as aesthetics and history, while moving thought beyond the limits of the epistemic subject. In this section, Benjamin's dissertation will be read in constellation with his 1919-22 essay on

Goethe's *Elective Affinities,* a text which marks an application and immanent critique of the notions elaborated in the "Concept of Criticism" (Caygill, 46; McCole, 117; Ferris, "Truth," 455-6).

Benjamin's gravitation towards Romanticism did not stem from some irrational rejection of reason, nor from the avowal of some vitalist cult of genius. Instead, Benjamin sought to redeem a "radical mystical formalism" from the writings of the Early Romantics, along with a model of "immanent critique," which he would re-fashion and employ throughout his own oeuvre (*SW 1:* 123; McCole, 82).[196] That is, Benjamin reads Romanticism philosophically: as a movement which continued to work through the implications of Kant's critical turn. As such, Benjamin's dissertation should be termed a "Romantic meta-critique"—to refashion Beiser's term (*Reason*, 4-9)— whereby "critique" as understood by Kant and the *Frühromantiker* is brought to bear upon itself in an immanent, supplementary, and self-reflective analysis of its own suppositions.[197]

At the outset of his dissertation, Benjamin distinguishes his own formal-transcendental attempt to grasp the "problem-historical context" of the Early Romantics

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[196] McCole describes the fundamental nature of Benjamin's encounter with the *Frühromantiker*: "Benjamin's recovery and critique of early romanticism set the coordinates for all his subsequent work. In a sense, his identification was so complete that he can be said to have refought the early romantics battles, working immanently" (82). In this way McCole sees Benjamin as engaging with the antinomies of Romanticism throughout his oeuvre, specifically in his discussions of Modernity and the avant-garde (in relation to Surrealism and Proust). However, McCole has a somewhat limited conception of Romanticism—as a mere collection of thinkers known as the *Frühromantiker*—and not as a broader intellectual milieu encompassing the philosophical positions of Idealism. In this manner, one can employ McCole's remarks, provided Romanticism be understood in a broader, more philosophical manner (Rajan, "Introduction," 14). Hansen has further stressed the extent to Benjamin's romantic framework remains "transcendental" (2).

[197] Beiser defines "meta-critique" as the unifying sentiment of "post-Kantian" philosophy (roughly between 1781-93, or the decade following the publication of Kant's *CPR*) an ethos which sets the stage for the emergence of both German Idealism and Romanticism (*Reason,* 1-15). Beiser employs the term to describe the "fate of reason" in the post-Kantian paradigm, in which post-Kantian thinkers understood "the duty of reason to criticize *all* our beliefs, then, *ipso facto* it must criticize [Reason] itself.... Unless criticism is to betray itself, it must become...meta-criticism, the critical examination of criticism itself." (*Reason*, 6, see 7-15). Generally, "critique" is associated with Kant's immanent formal critique of reason according to its own terms, along with his separation of the transcendental and the empirical domains, which reduces experience to its "possibility." However, as I will argue in this section, the idea of critique (or philosophy as criticism) remains important for Benjamin, the *Frühromantiker,* and the German Idealists, thinkers who seek to speculatively invade Kantian notions of critique, opening it to a broader range of experiences and possible objects. Supplementing Beiser, I define Benjamin's philosophy as a "Romantic meta-critique," in which criticism is understood as immanent and creatively supplementary with respect to the object of critique.

from a mere exegesis or history of the literary movement (*SW 1:* 116; fn185). The latter undertakings should be considered mere commentary, or an analysis of the "material content," providing a provisional surface reading of the *Frühromantiker* as an unbridled mystical "cult of genius," which degenerated into religiosity, only to be superseded by the absolute Idealism of Schelling and Hegel. Against such caricatured views, Benjamin commences with the critical assertion: "the Romantic determination of the concept of criticism...stands completely on epistemological presuppositions" (*SW 1:* 116); that is, there exists a formal-epistemological philosophy in the fragments of the *Frühromantiker,* along with a methodological concept of criticism which Benjamin will refashion towards his own concerns.[198] As Caygill, Gasché, and McCole have noted, Benjamin performatively develops his own model of immanent critique through analyses of the Early Romantics and Goethe (34-35; "Sober," 51-3; 85-86): a model of philosophy which does not impose pre-formed categories upon its object, but rather, is immanently and reciprocally shaped by the object of critique. However, scholarship generally sees Benjamin as "parting ways" with Romanticism (Gasché, "Sober," 53), which is understood in a limited fashion, as more or less the *Frühromantik* period (1796-1806)*,* excluding a broader notion of Romanticism which would include the later Romantic-Idealism of Schelling, Hegel, and Hölderlin.[199] What is staged in Benjamin's dissertation is the genesis of "critique" from its negative and regulative function in Kant, to a more positive and expansive position in the *Frühromantiker* and later Idealists. However, Benjamin's cast of Romantic-Idealism is much darker, or mortuary, centering on a metaphysics of transience, and inhabiting a melancholic aesthetic akin to Schelling's "middle period," which speaks of a similar "veil of dejection that is spread over all nature" (*FE,* 63).

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[198] Benjamin further specifies the philosophical-epistemological aim of his research as an attempt to sketch the "methodological grid for the thought of the *Frühromantiker"* (*SW 1:* 135). Despite the fragmentary and discontinuous appearance of their writings, there exists a "spirit of the system" latent in the *Frühromantiker* if grouped in constellation (*SW 1:* 136; Hansen & Benjamin, 3).

[199] Hansen & Benjamin position Hölderlin, along with Goethe, as the "extremes" which define Benjamin's version of Romanticism (5-6). See further, Caygill (35, 49), Weber (11-19), Fenves (18-43), and Ferris (*Companion,* 33-36).

Benjamin felt an affinity with the Early Romantics for what he saw as a proto-modern experimental culture of "the absolute," one which sought to establish a new encyclopedic "poetic culture" able to unify the diverse strivings of epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, aesthetics, and politics (McCole, 86-7). McCole further underscores the affinity of the *Frühromantik* program with a Nietzschean notion of Modernity: a generation of thinkers which attempted to create new values, grounding novel models of normativity in the force of their own assertions (85). This "modern" character of the Early Romantics is echoed throughout Benjamin's correspondence (*BC,* 136). Benjamin was further drawn to the *Frühromantiker* because of their anti or para-university commitments: their refusal to limit inquiry into "the absolute" to any one discipline or institution (Lacoue-Labarthe, "Introduction," 9-11). Instead, the *Frühromantiker* undertook philosophy by way of their collaborative and interdisciplinary journal (*The Athenaeum*), a practice paralleled in Benjamin's own repeated attempts to found a journal (*Angelus Novus*) that would be worthy of his interdisciplinary philosophy for the future (*BC,* 186-200; Hansen & Benjamin, "Introduction," 1-4). Throughout his correspondence, Benjamin repeatedly laments that the "romantic core of romanticism" could not be properly grasped due to the "entirely hopeless situation of the contemporary university" (*BC,* 139-40, 135-6, 111). Such a conflictual relationship with the university and its discourse animates all of Benjamin's writing in this period (1921-8), culminating in the rejection- withdrawal of his *Habilitation,* and his definitive "break" with the university in 1928 (*BC*, 293-5).

Despite the anti-Kantian motivation of Benjamin's dissertation, "The Concept of Criticism" should not be seen as a wholesale break with Benjamin's Kantian schema (as presented in Ch. 3), but rather, an immanent critique of reason according to its own terminology, or a "meta-critique" through which philosophy comes to encounter itself reflexively. It is within such a reflexive space that Benjamin will forward his own positive philosophy of criticism in which "the term critical meant objectively productive, [something] creative out of thoughtful deliberation" (*SW 1:* 142). Caygill stresses the continuity of Benjamin's analyses of Romanticism with his early program for a "coming philosophy," theorizing both as a shared attempt to develop an expansive "speculative philosophy of experience," in which Benjamin's dissertation probes "the challenge[s]

posed to Kantian transcendental critique by the Romantic extension of the concept of experience" (34, 40). Thus, though "experience" is not explicitly thematized in Benjamin's dissertation, it nonetheless remains an important moment throughout Benjamin's philosophy of criticism, surfacing in the critic's speculative experience of the work of art, and as will be argued in the next section, through the metaphysical experience of nature. With such Romantic interventions upon the Kantian program, Benjamin moves towards Schelling and Hegel's "absolute Idealism," which strove to overcome the antinomies of Kantian-Fichtean "subjective Idealism," by situating them within a broader metaphysical fold, seeing rationality in a broader, unconditioned sense (Beiser, *Idealism,* 350, 368, 370-1).

Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe see Benjamin as "revolutionizing" the study of the *Frühromantiker* via his positioning of Romanticism within the aporias opened by Kantian thought, demonstrating the development of a reflexive critical discourse —in a manner akin to philosophical Idealism—within such a space (46, 106, cf. 32-33). Such revolutions notwithstanding, Gasché's view is that although Benjamin provides a "correct and fruitful view of the early romantic philosophical conceptions," his argument is also "thoroughly flawed, not only for philological, but [also] for discursive-argumentative reasons as well" ("Sober," 51). For W. Menninghaus, such errors are due to Benjamin's attempts to force the *Frühromantiker* to parrot his own intellectual concerns, specifically his early philosophy of language (27-28). While there is little doubt that Benjamin's idiosyncratic readings of Goethe and the Early Romantics coerce these thinkers into the orbit of his own philosophical program, such a shocking constellation of past and present concerns— a "mak[ing] the continuum of history explode" (*SW 4:* 395)— is precisely what Benjamin intends to provoke throughout his oeuvre. Put otherwise, it is far too easy to chastise Benjamin for his unorthodox readings of past thinkers (as Gasché and Menninghaus do); instead, one should understand these thinkers in constellation with Benjamin's own views, examining the extent to which he employs historical thinkers as an experimental foil out of which to forward his own viewpoints.

Gasché (in "The Sober Absolute") wants to lead Benjamin away from the early romantics towards a "sober" model of criticism and the absolute, whereas I contend that Benjamin remains deeply involved with a darkened vision of Romanticism, one centered

on motifs of transience and allegory. With respect to the *Frühromantiker,* Gasché considers how Benjamin's analyses can be so intellectually illuminating, while being "terminologically and conceptually wrong" ("Sober," 51). For Gasché, this is due to Benjamin's spiritual grasp of the essential *Frühromantik* understanding of criticism as a "poeticizing," "romanticizing," or "potentiating" gesture with respect to the object of critique. Pushed further, Benjamin immanently (and speculatively) refashions the Early Romantic concept of criticism, utilizing it in the elaboration of his own concerns, and oftentimes enacting destructive violence upon the original texts. For Benjamin, criticism is not simply the negative evaluation of a work, but rather, a positive unfolding of the text by way of contemporary constellations, along with the work's "natural historical...pre- and post-history" (*OT,* 24-26). Benjamin "romanticizes" the *Frühromantiker,* positioning them within the broader unfolding that is the development of his own expanded concept of critique. Benjamin remains within the Romantic fold of concerns, darkening the Early Romantics in the creation of his own mortuary romantic philosophy. Benjamin employs a Romantic hermeneutic with respect to the *Frühromantiker,* which can be thought in terms of Schleiermacher's "subjective-divinatory reading," whereby the critic is continually engaged in processes of hermeneutical supplementation, continually potentiating, or absolutizing the text.[200] The following section will explore the anti-humanist elements of Benjamin's understanding of criticism. As for Benjamin, both the author and critic are subsumed by the natural history of the work of art, of which they are merely moments, or differing potencies in the continuum of the work.

**4.1.2 Benjamin's Death of the Author: The Aesthetic Object (Against the Subject)**
"No poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the audience."
Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," *SW 1: 253.*

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[200] According to Rajan, Schleiermacher's "proto-Hegelian concept of the [subjective divinatory reading] is concerned with the text as part of an ongoing process that requires an imaginative leap on the part of the reader to discern its direction...subjective-divinatory reading goes beyond the merely technical to consider what has not yet found expression in the text, namely the process initiated but not completed in its writing" (*Supplement,* 43). There are evident affinities between such a romantic hermeneutic and Benjamin's description of the "natural history" of works, wherein the work develops and is supplemented via its "pre- and post-history" (*OT,* 26-27).

Benjamin's "Program" sought to overcome the (neo) Kantian subject-object distinction through the imposition of a sphere of "total neutrality between subject and object," and as I argued in the previous chapter, such a sphere was "language" (*SW 1:* 104). In Benjamin's later philosophy of criticism, domains such as the aesthetic and the corresponding practice of criticism come to occupy a similar position in allowing philosophy to speculatively encounter a diversity of domains and experiences, while moving thought beyond the epistemological atomism of subject-object dualism.[201] Benjamin sees the Early Romantics as moving past the Kantian-Fichtean subject centered epistemological conception of philosophy, towards a romantic philosophy of "infinite reflection," or "I-less... reflection" (Menninghaus, 50), in which reason is encountered "objectively" as well as "subjectively." Benjamin's "subject-less" model of reflection, along with his corresponding critical employment of the aesthetic domain, should be seen in constellation with other absolute Idealist interventions upon the Kantian program.[202] In this section I will argue that Benjamin's model of criticism violently moves against the author, and subjective Idealist philosophy more generally, seeing reason as manifesting in a broader absolute sense.

In his *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790), Kant describes the limited position of aesthetics within his critical project, repeating the common disregard of art in vogue since the primal scene of the philosophy of art: Plato's excision of the poets from his ideal republic, or the casting out of art and aesthetics from meaningful philosophical discussion (Bernstein, *Fate,* 1-4). Kant reduces art—in spite of its beautiful and sublime moments—to a mere play, or "harmony," of the faculties, whereby reason intervenes in the case of the sublime, and in the case of the beautiful the imagination and understanding enter into accord under the auspices of "common sense" (*CPJ,* 145-147,

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[201] Describing the potential for a mutually supplementary dialogue between aesthetics and philosophy, Benjamin writes: "critique seeks to discover siblings of the work of art. And all genuine works have their siblings in the realm of philosophy." (*SW 1:* 333). Such a meta-critical capacity for aesthetics is fleshed out further in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* (*AT,* 262).

[202] Beiser notes that in the transition from a subjective to an absolute understanding of Idealism, the aesthetic domain comes to play a pivotal role in expanding the limited purview of subjective *Aufklärung* (*Idealism*, 372-4). Within absolute Idealism, art plays a mediatory and unifying role, such that it can be considered a cipher to a broad constellation of domains: metaphysics, ethics and politics (Beiser, *Idealism,* 39-42). For Benjamin, the aesthetic is likewise employed to meta-critically open philosophy in a polyphony of directions, while moving against the subjective Idealist philosophical subject.

122-4). For Kant, the aesthetic object essentially "drops out," having little meaningful autonomy independent of its relation to the judgments of a spectating subject.

Despite such a repression of art, the secondary aim of Kant's *CPJ*—the construction of a model of "teleological judgment" (Zamitto, *Judgment,* 5-7)–opens the door to the post-Kantian aesthetic invasions of philosophy performed by Schiller, Hölderlin, the Schlegels, Novalis, Schelling, and Hegel. These thinkers play upon the "organic" affinity between art and nature discussed, though prohibited, by Kant (*CPJ,* 221-30, 242-46). Art, following nature, becomes a means through which to unify diverse domains within an organic continuum, and above all attains an autonomous, revelatory, and speculative function within the philosophical system. The danger posed by the autonomous-accidental position of art will be explored in the final chapter of this project dealing with Hegel.

For the *Frühromantiker*, criticism was not a mere evaluative judgment of the work of art, as it was for Kant, but instead, a positive, experimental, and supplementary gesture, through which the individual work of art is "romanticized" or "poeticized": located within the broader sequence of "forms of art" in a progression towards the poetic absolute (*SW 1:*154-5, 156). Criticism unfolds the immanent potential latent within every work by seeing it in relation to the broader historical working out of "art": "Criticism... discerns the traces of the infinite left in a particular reflection or work of art" (Caygill, 43).[203] Criticism does not decode the work by way of authorial intention, or some other nexus of meaning, but rather, the specific work is located historically, as participating in the universal progression of art. In a similar manner, Benjamin sees particular acts of translation as discerning the traces of "language as such" from within particular expressions (*SW 1:* 261). For Benjamin and the *Frühromantiker,* the aesthetic becomes a similar space of "meta-critique" that allows them to work through and move beyond Kantian subjective Idealism.

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[203] Caygill sees Benjamin as sketching a middle ground, or Kantian "critical path," between "the normative rules of neo-classicism and the unruly subjective genius of the *Sturm und Drang* analogous to that of Kantian critique between dogmatism and skepticism" (41). Gasché sees the *Frühromantiker* (and Benjamin) as breaking with a "dogmatic rationalism of aesthetics": mediating between the idolization of subjective genius in the *Sturm and Drang* and the lack of agency accorded to the aesthetic object in Kant ("Sober,"53).

Benjamin highlights Novalis' remark, "the true reader must be the extended author": the critic, via interpretation, participates in "completing the work," entering it into the broader aesthetic absolute (*SW 1:* 152-3). Caygill (45-60) continually highlights this "speculative" and supplementary dimension of Benjamin's concept of criticism: in viewing the work of art as essentially incomplete in relation to the absolute progression of forms—as a "torso" in the Hölderlinian sense (*SW 1:* 340-1)—critique supplements the work by way of "pre and post-history" (*OT,* 24-26).[204] In this way, "absolutizing" the work contains a destructive moment in which the critic violently wrests the work from its contemporary context, (re)positioning it within speculative constellations. Accentuating this violence of critique, Caygill writes: "critique disturbs the identity of the work by opening it to future possibilities" (45, cf. 60).

As will be elaborated in the next section, Benjamin positions the Early Romantics as breaking with the "subjective Idealism" of Fichte (and Kant), with his argument that, for the *Frühromantiker,* "the midpoint of reflection is art, not the 'I'" (*SW 1:* 134). The self-conscious "thinking of thinking of thinking" (*SW 1:* 129) –or the reflection of consciousness upon itself through "positing" first inaugurated by Fichte—does not occur through the spontaneous freedom of the subject ("the I"), but rather, through the medium of art and aesthetic criticism. As Benjamin continues, "The *Frühromantik* intuition of art rests on this: that in the thinking of thinking no consciousness of the "I" is understood. Reflection without the 'I' is a reflection in the absolute of art" (*SW 1:* 134, cf. 135). Following the principles of "absolute Idealism," the objectivity of the work becomes "axiomatic" for Benjamin (Caygill, 41): the transcendental subject is dethroned from its privileged epistemic position, becoming one center of reflection among many.

Illustrative of Benjamin's "subject-less" philosophy of reflection are his comments on the "death of the author"—or the use and misuse of the author function—in his essay

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[204] Schleiermacher, who consolidated many insights from the *Frühromantiker* in his own "romantic hermeneutic," describes the hermeneutic process as a similar process of supplementation. Elaborating his "divinatory" model of reading (in relation to mere "historical" reading), Rajan writes: "The historical method examines the text as a finished product, whereas the divinatory method grasps it as a moment in a process and considers how a discourse that is produced by a certain line of thought in turn reacts upon those thoughts, so as to require a reader who will understand 'better than its creator' the potential within it..." (*Supplement,* 41, see further, 38, 43, 81-98, 69-72).

on Goethe's *Elective Affinities.* In part two of the essay, Benjamin polemicizes against his contemporaries in the Stefan George circle, in particular Gundolf, who mythologized Goethe's life as a means to explain his works (*SW 1:* 322-323; 313, 318-9).[205] Benjamin condemns, the "Thoughtless dogma of the Goethe cult," which committed the "*proton pseudos"* [First Falsehood] of criticism: seeking to gain an understanding of the work of art by understanding the subjective conditions of its production (*SW 1:* 324). Against such vulgar "*Erlebnis* philosophy," Benjamin emphatically asserts, "Works, like deeds, are non-derivable" (*SW 1:* 321). For Benjamin, the production of the work takes place in a Blanchotian "space of literature": in which (in Blanchot's terms) one surrenders subjective agency to the "demand of the work," which has a dynamism and drive of its own (49-59, 211-4). Benjamin describes artistic creation in similarly anti-subjectivist terms: "For the great work does not take shape in ordinary existence" (*SW 1:* 321). Further, Benjamin accords a "natural history" to the works themselves: "the artist is less the primal ground or creator than the origin or form giver, and certainly his work is not at any price his creature but rather, his form. To be sure, the form, too, and not only the creature has life" (*SW 1:* 323-4). These remarks show the extent to which Benjamin accords agency to "the object" (or work) over and against the subject, as his philosophy dispenses with the epistemic subject as a site of constitutive stability. Benjamin affirms his own Early Romantic leanings: criticism is not an attempt to decode or evaluate the work in any sense—by way of its author, history, material-social context–but rather, critique is a gesture of supplementation that completes and unfolds the work further. Schlegel considered his "*Übermeister"* criticism of Goethes' *Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahren* the culmination or completion of the work, not a decoding, or "laying out" of the work by means of some variable. Likewise, for Benjamin, criticism is not a secondary

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[205] Despite this, Benjamin does allow for the selective application of "life-content" in the analysis of works, though such biographical considerations have no place within the hallowed practices of commentary and critique (*SW 1:* 321-3; 325; 321). In fact, Benjamin's own marital disintegration was mirrored in Goethe's novel, with the role of Otillie being played by Jula Cohen, to whom Benjamin's essay is dedicated. See Eiland & Jennings, *A Critical Life,* 141-48. Though Benjamin himself advocated a selective employment of the authorial function vis-à-vis the text, he repeatedly chastised those, such as Max Brod with respect to Kafka (*SW 2:* 794-820*; SW: 3:* 317-321), or Gundolf with respect to Goethe (*SW 1:* 97-99; 297-360), who uncritically revered such authors by way of an auratic concept of genius.

activity, but is on par with creation itself (contra M. Arnold).[206] As is for Adorno, for Benjamin, all great works are "late-works" in which the medium of art transcends the subject and their agency. Such interventions in aesthetics and the related practice of criticism demonstrate Benjamin's larger movement away from subjective Idealism—or the model of philosophy as epistemology practiced by Kant and Fichte —and into the "force-field" of Romantic-Idealist meta-critique.

### 4.1.3 Kant, Fichte, Romanticism, and Goethe: The Genesis of Critique

"Kant introduced the concept of the negative into philosophy. Wouldn't it be worthwhile trying now to introduce the concept of the positive into philosophy as well?" Athenaeum Fragments, #3.

Benjamin's dissertation, along with his corresponding essay on Goethe, contain sustained reflections on the question of "critique" (along with the practice of criticism): on its limits, aims, and purpose within the philosophical tradition (*SW 1:* 142-3; 117). However, Benjamin does not simply posit some static critical method which he then applies to texts and objects, but rather, performatively works out such a model through textual encounters, engaging in an immanent "meta-critique"—or "critique of critique"—through which reason is able to reflect upon itself (Caygill , 50).[207] What is charted in this constellation of Benjamin's texts is the movement of critique from its merely negative or evaluative-regulative sense (in Kant), towards a more positive, creative, and

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[206] Arnold (in "The Function of Criticism"), distinguishes between epochs of "creativity" (or "epochs of expansion," 4-9) and eras of "criticism" (or "epochs of concentration, "14), the latter of which are supposedly of a lower rank than the former (4, 5-6). Though criticism still plays an important sober ("disinterested," 18) social function in educating the public with regard to creative acts (of poetry), it does not live up to the high standards of the creative work (40-1). Benjamin deconstructs such a distinction by seeing criticism as equally important and supplementary with respect to the original work. Benjamin likewise overcomes such a distinction between epochs of "decay" and "renaissance [or 'decadence']" (*OT,* 18; cf. *Arcades,* 458).

[207] Describing the immanent genesis of Benjamin's concept of critique, Caygill writes: "Benjamin's critique of German Romanticism exemplifies his finite, transformative concept of critique. It does not begin with a philosophically secured concept of truth and value which is then applied to an object in critical judgment, but rather philosophy itself is risked in the critical encounter." (50). Caygill further describes Benjamin's movement beyond the narrow confines of Kantian epistemology in a manner akin to Hegel: "The object of critique reflects the limitations of the given doctrine of criticism back upon the critic who then approaches the object anew. In this way Benjamin repeats the Hegelian critique of the finite character of Kantian critique—its narrow notion of experience that banished the absolute from thought—but without the collateral of a progressive philosophy of history. The absolute is folded into experience in complex and often inconspicuous ways, which it becomes the task of critique not at the outset to judge, but first to delineate and map" (50).

expansive understanding of critique in the *Frühromantiker,* Goethe, and German Idealism. Benjamin's own intellectual *"Bildung"* rehearses the Romantic-Idealist intervention upon the subjective Idealism of Kant and Fichte. Against the Kantian reduction of philosophy to a mere subjective Idealism, Benjamin opens epistemological problematics by way of the metaphysical domain in order to think philosophy in an expanded absolute sense.

In the *CPR*, Kant defines critique in a "negative" manner: as the reflexive examination of the limits and scope of reason according to its own standards (*CPR,* 114). Describing this (limited) Kantian conception of critique, McCole writes, "criticism [for Kant] meant objective reflection on the universal characteristic of the cognizing subject, not license to pass arbitrary judgments from an unexamined standpoint" (85, cf. 86-7). For Benjamin, though Kant's work offered a "Map through the bare woods of reality" (*SW 1:* 298), by providing thought with a transcendental framework through which to view the world, such a limited epistemological framework led Kant to reduce the polyphony of experience to the schematization of the twelve categories (*SW 1:* 100-10).

In the context of his dissertation, Benjamin articulates similar qualms with the Kantian program, though they are couched by way of Fichte: a thinker who saw himself perfecting the subjective Idealist program inaugurated by Kant, "in spirit" and not in "letter" (Fichte, *Wissenschaftslehre,* 2-6; Beiser, *Idealism,* 260). Fichte's thought commences with a radical interrogation of the "categorical antinomy" first presented by Kant in his "third antinomy" (*CPR,* 484-489). Here Kant questions how freedom (or "spontaneity"), which grounds the whole sphere of practical ethical reason, can exist alongside the deterministic realm of causal laws that is nature. Fichte probes the proper relationship between the epistemic-ethical subject and the determinism of nature. In a Rousseauesque spirit which was echoed by the events of the French Revolution, Fichte contends that philosophy must side with the freedom of "the act" over and against the determinism of "the fact" (*Wissenschaftslehre,* 51). One who commences philosophy is immediately confronted with the intractable dilemma between "dogmatism" (or pantheistic naturalism: "necessity"), and "Idealism" (or the freedom of the intellect), a dilemma which Fichte stages in ethical terms: "the kind of philosophy one chooses thus depends on the kind of person one is" (*Wissenschaftslehre,* 20, cf. 25, 43). To preserve

freedom—and practical reason—philosophy must begin with the "intellectual intuition" of the absolute subject, which "posits" itself reflectively in the continual movement of consciousness (Fichte, *Wissenschaftslehre,* 46, 40-1). Such a dialectic of consciousness, between the "I" and "not-I," progresses *ad infinitum*, with Fichte granting the "self-positing ego" absolute status in a regulative (contra constitutive) sense (Fichte, *Wissenschaftslehre,* 40-1, 101; Beiser, *Idealism,* 217-8).

Benjamin argues that such Fichtean "self-reflection" is the most frequent "type" of thought for the *Frühromantiker*, and as such, Fichte's writings serve as "indispensable sources" for the "comprehension" of the *Frühromantik* conception of criticism (*SW 1:* 121). Such a model of criticism strives, through self-reflection, to reflect on the movement of thought itself: "to understand understanding" [*Das Verstehen zu verstehen*] (*GS I:* 18).[208] The *Frühromantiker* were particularly drawn to Fichte's notion of "intellectual intuition," in which the subject projects an immediate non-discursive knowledge of itself as "absolute subject" (Fichte, *Wissenschaftslehre,* 46). According to Fichte, there exists a reciprocal relationship between "reflective thinking and immediate cognition" (*SW 1:* 121), through which the subject comes to understand its "absolute" status: recognizing the fundamental role played by consciousness in the constitution of all experience.

However, Benjamin notes that an understanding of the *Frühromantik* proximity to Fichte is efficacious only in order to see the "philosophical and epistemological motives by which they part with him" (*SW 1:* 122, 119). That is, the *Frühromantiker* stand on the threshold between the "subjective Idealism" of Kant and Fichte and the "objective" or "absolute" Idealism thematized by Schelling and Hegel. The Early Romantics commence with the Fichtean movement of consciousness—in which "the I" comes to comprehend itself through the unconscious act of self-positing and subsequent reflection—which they then speculatively unbind, creating an "infinitude of reflection." Though such a

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[208] Benjamin describes the Romantic meta-critical "radical mystical formalism" (*SW 1:* 123), as follows: "It is a question *not* of the cognition of an object through intuition, but of the self-cognition of a method, of something formal—and the absolute subject represents nothing other than this" (*SW 1:* 122). Elaborating this centrality of self-consciousness to *Frühromantik* epistemology, Benjamin writes: "Thinking that reflects on itself in self-consciousness is the basic fact from which Schlegel's and, in large part, Novalis' epistemological considerations take their start" (*SW 1:* 120).

movement of positing and reflection could progress to infinity, ultimately Fichte brought reflection back to the finite subject so as to preserve the possibility of ethics (*SW* 1: 125); whereas the *Frühromantiker* refused such closure, seeking to open thought to an "infinitude of reflection" (*SW 1:* 119). With their radicalization of the Fichtean position, the Early Romantics move thought beyond the constitutive epistemic subject, considering reason in an absolute manner.

Instead of locating reflection in the subject (or Fichtean "I"), the *Frühromantiker* understood reality as a vital force, an "infinitude of reflection," in which "everything in it is to hang together in an infinite many ways" (*SW 1:* 126, 119). As Benjamin continues, "For Fichte, consciousness is the 'I' for the Romantics, it is the self" (*SW 1:* 128). This "self" should be understood as a site in which "'reflection expands without limit or check... and [reflective thinking] turns into formless thinking which directs itself upon the Absolute" (*SW 1:* 129 ).[209] Though the Romantics began with the subject, they expanded and potentiated it towards the absolute: "The romantics start from mere thinking-oneself... this is proper to everything, *for everything is a self*" (*SW 1:* 128). According to Benjamin, Novalis positions Romantic thought as a "Fichteanism without check," in which all of reality is seen as an infinite continuum of self-reflective "I-ness" (*SW 1:* 132). Following the Fichtean formal model of reflection—the "thinking of thinking"—in which thought takes itself as an object, the Romantics introduce a "third level of reflection" of thought thinking its own movement: "the thinking of thinking of thinking," which dissolved the Fichtean model into the broader fold of the absolute, such that thinking the world and one's intuition of oneself become reciprocal concepts (*SW 1:* 129, 132). To "Romanticize," for Benjamin (in a manner akin to Novalis), entails the "qualitative potentiation" of thought, a movement beyond the subject, recognizing the

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[209] Further, describing the *Frühromantik* movement beyond the subjective Idealism of Fichte— specifically his dialectic of positing and reflection— Benjamin writes, "As Fichte located the whole of the real in acts of positing though only by virtue of a *telos* that he introduced into these—so Schlegel saw, immediately and without holding this in need of a proof, the whole of the real unfolding in its full content, with increasing distinctness up to the highest clarity of the absolute, in the stages of reflection" (*SW 1:* 130). That is, the *Frühromantiker* move beyond Fichte's conditioning of reflection by way of the philosophical subject, undertaking reflection without limit or check.

diversity of moments, or "selves," present in the larger continuum of the absolute (*SW 1:*133).

Benjamin and the *Frühromantiker* deconstruct and refashion critique "against epistemology," to employ Adorno's phrase (*Against*, 1-8). That is, Benjamin's philosophy as criticism commences by rejecting the subjective Idealist diminution of philosophy to epistemology, instead undertaking a broader "meta-critique" which charts the "thinking of thinking of thinking," or the immanent reflection of reason upon itself so as to determine its limits and proper employment. Gasché (in "The Sober Absolute") argues that although Benjamin shares many Early Romantic convictions regarding the practice of criticism, he is also extremely critical of the transcendent and mystical-religious sentiments into which the movement lapsed (62-4).[210] According to Gasché, Benjamin attempts a critical rapprochement with the movement, forwarding his own "sober" understanding of the absolute, one which is associated with "nature, fate, myth, [and] more generally the profane" ("Sober," 57). However, as will be argued in the next section, Gasché's sober "prosaic" gloss fails to grasp the transient metaphysics grounding Benjamin's mortuary model of Romantic criticism. This constellation of themes— "nature, fate, myth...the profane" —should instead be collected under the general heading of "transience" [*Vergänglichkeit*], anticipating the discussions of "allegory" and "natural history" in Benjamin's *Trauerspiel.* Benjamin asserts the primacy of destruction and change against the religiosity of the Romantic symbol, moving *Frühromantik* criticism towards his mortuary vision of Romanticism.

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[210] Benjamin criticizes the *Frühromantiker* for conflating "the abstract and the universal" (*SW 1*: 166–7; Gasché, "Sober," 62): postulating a mystical thesis regarding the absolute as a work of art, and further believing that such an absolute could be grasped through mere intuition (without the labour of the concept). Put otherwise, the *Frühromantiker* too hastily collapsed the Kantian distinction between "concept and intuition" (Hansen & Benjamin, 3). For Benjamin, despite their Kantian proclivities, the *Frühromantiker* remained marred by irrational mythology, and their later religious conversions only served to confirm this. Benjamin further sought to amend such a mystical theory by way of Goethe in the work's unpublished afterward (*SW 1:* 178- 185). As Gasché writes, the *Frühromantiker "*infringed upon the rule that [forbade] mixing genres of thought"; thus, for Benjamin, "Romantic art criticism is anything but critical; it fails to distinguish and set apart as trenchantly and vigorously as the concept of criticism calls for" ("Sober," 62, 64). For Gasché, the *Frühromantik* affirmative understanding of the absolute "entails a loss of the force of transcendence and the relativization of difference ("Sober," 63); that is, despite the romantic attempt for formalize criticism as a practice, they ended up succumbing to the same mythological dogma they set out to resist.

Benjamin's understanding of the absolute should be considered "profane," in the sense that criticism strives after "profane illumination" (*SW 2:* 209), that is, the speculative illumination of critical capacities latent within the work, which if constellated correctly allow the object of critique to shine forth anew.[211] Caygill glosses Benjamin as a thinker of the "folded" or "discontinuous absolute," one who searched for the traces of transcendence folded within the secular and profane realm (50). Benjamin's ruined *Arcades Project,* with its descriptions of Paris, fashion, toys, "interiority," and advertising can be seen as "romantic encyclopedia" (to follow Novalis): an attempt to "absolutize" the historical experience of the 19th century by way of allegorical immersion in particular objects.[212]

Benjamin's critical supplementation of the Early Romantic concept of criticism is expressed by his distinction between "truth and material content" in his essay on Goethe's *Wahlverwandtschaften* (1921).[213] "Material content" as the factual content of the work is aimed at by provisional "commentary," whereas "truth-content" is arrived at by way of an analysis of form which is "romanticized" by way of critique in relation to a

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[211] For Benjamin, "The absolute becomes de-sacralized, de-divinized by refection...soberly rational and down to earth" (Gasché, "Sober," 65). Benjamin's understanding of criticism aims at the "prosaic core" of every work: the transparent, colourless, quality of the work as illuminated through the sober light of critique (McCole, 105, 151; Gasché, "Sober," 65). For Gasché, the great moments of the *Frühromantiker* lie in their "total relinquishing of transcendence" ("Sober," 67), in their glorification of the immanent sober truth of every work, over and against theological transcendence. I wish to push against such a "sober" understanding of Benjamin's model of criticism, seeing him as an allegorical—though nonetheless speculative—Romantic thinker.

[212] Benjamin's *Arcades* can be seen as a (ruined-unfinished) Romantic encyclopedia, one which sought to organize speculative and interdisciplinary insights via a potentiation of the various objects or spheres from nineteenth- century Paris, all in an attempt to provoke a "historical experience" in its readers (see the two "Exposes" of the project [1935/39], *Arcades,* 4-24). For a description of Novalis' project see Wood, "Introduction" (ix-xxx) in *Novalis: Notes for a Romantic Encyclopedia.* Novalis attempted to romanticize particular moments in relation to the absolute, whereas Benjamin attempted to arrange various fragments so as to provoke the historical experience of the nineteenth century.

[213] In his essay "Goethe's *Elective Affinities,*" Benjamin proposes a distinction between "commentary" and "criticism," the former aiming at the material content of the work ("the way of meaning"), while the latter aims at the "truth content": the relation of these material elements to history and tradition. Describing this, Benjamin writes: "Whereas for the former [commentary], wood and ash remain the sole objects of his analysis, for the latter only the flame itself preserves an enigma: that of what is alive. Thus, the critic inquires into the truth, whose living flame continues to burn over the heavy logs of what is past and the light ashes of what has been experienced" (*SW 1:* 298). Describing the "risk" of criticism, given its proximity to the original text (and its dependence on it), Missac writes: "Commentary, aspiring to a status close to, and perhaps rivaling, that of the original, depends on the original for its confirmation, or rather, as I have said, collaborates with it in an enterprise that is presumed to be mutually profitable but that is dangerous as well, since it jeopardizes the autonomy of both partners" (17).

poetic absolute (*SW 1:* 314).[214] Benjamin stresses that criticism is not some gesture of unmasking or decoding "the veil" of the text: "the task of art criticism is not to lift the veil but rather, through the most precise knowledge of it as a veil, to raise itself for the first time to the true view of the beautiful" (*SW 1:* 351). Benjamin formulates "Beauty" as "the object in its veil" (*SW 1:* 351), seeing it as bound up intimately with a transient notion of "semblance (*Schein*)" (*SW 1:* 350). These discussions anticipate Benjamin's later analysis of Plato's *Symposium,* whereby he allegorizes the fleeting nature of critical truth by way of the transient ephemerality of beauty (*OT,* 5-8). Within the context of his Goethe essay, Benjamin allegorizes Ottilie's beauty as a figure of the fleeting unapproachability of the text's "truth-content." Pushed further, in the mythical-naturalist environment of Goethe's novel, Ottilie's innocent beauty leads to the fateful downfall of all involved: nature and mythology triumph at the expense of morality and the stability of truth.

This dark, semblance-like element of beauty highlights the destructive character of criticism for Benjamin, along with the intimate connection between natural history and truth content. Describing Benjamin's destructive optic, Kracauer writes: "the truth content of a work reveals itself only in its collapse ... the work's claim to totality, its systematic structure, as well as its superficial intentions share the fate of everything transient; but as they pass away with time the work brings characteristics and configurations to the fore that are actually images of truth" (Kracauer, xv; cf. Adorno, *AT,* 195). Criticism, for Benjamin, is fundamentally destructive with respect to the object of criticism. Benjamin continually affirms the mortuary "destructive character" of criticism, which enacts a "flaming up" of "the veil" that is the exterior of the work (*OT,* 7; *SW 1:* 298), and can only be enacted by recognizing the proviso that "only he who can destroy can criticize" (*SW1:* 460). As Benjamin writes in his avant-garde program, "The

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[214] Further, describing the respective tasks of commentary and critique, Benjamin writes: "Critique seeks the truth content of the work of art; commentary its material content. The relation between the two is determined by the basic law of literature according to which the more significant the work, the more inconspicuously and intimately its truth content is bound up with its material content" (*SW 1:* 297). And further, "For critique ultimately shows in the work of art the virtual possibility of formulating the work's truth content as the highest possible problem." (*SW 1:* 334). Adorno further fleshes out the implications of such a distinction. See "Enigmaticalness, Truth-Content, Metaphysics" (*AT,* 118-136).

Destructive Character" (1931), "the destructive character knows only one watchword: make room. And only one activity: clearing away...For destroying rejuvenates, because it clears away the traces of our own age" (*SW 2:* 541).[215] By engaging with such epistemo-critical antinomies, Benjamin was led into the domain of Idealist-Romantic metaphysics.

## 4.2 Metaphysics (Or Benjamin's *Naturphilosophie*)

> "Philosophy...is nothing other than a *natural history of our mind...*we consider the system of our ideas, not in its *being,* but its becoming...the system of nature is at the same time the system of our mind." Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature,* 30.

The Early Romantics (and Goethe) should not be seen as comprising a simple literary movement— some offshoot of the anti-enlightenment *Sturm und Drang*—but rather, should be understood as thinkers involved in the creation of a new "modern" understanding of philosophy and its relation to society, politics, art, and nature (Beiser, *Romantic,* ix-x, 1-5; Nancy & Lacoue-Labarthe, xv, 5). Beiser notes that many of the "absolute Idealist" motifs attributed to Hegel—such as "identity in difference, subject-object identity, *Naturphilosophie*"—should more accurately be seen as arising from the broader "Romantic" milieu he inhabited (*Romantic*, 33; *Hegel,* 5-6, 13; *Idealism,* 508-510). In this manner, "Romanticism" should be understood as the broader "intellectual and artistic milieu" in which the meta-critical debates of post-Kantian Idealism were staged, eviscerating any hard distinction between "Idealism" and "Romanticism" (Rajan, "Introduction," 14; "Encyclopedia, 353). The Idealist-Romantic "force-field" (Adorno, *Kant,* 4), facilitated vibrant debates regarding the proper purview of philosophy, questioning its relationship to proximal domains such as poetry, the natural sciences, art, and aesthetics, while posing more fundamental questions relating to the status of metaphysics following Kant's critical interventions and his prolegomena for future systems. Benjamin should be seen as a thinker who inhabits this meta-critical space

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[215] Describing the "destructive character" as a Nietzschean form of historical consciousness, or actively nihilistic relationship to tradition, Benjamin writes: "The destructive character stands in the front line of traditionalists. Some people pass things down to posterity, by making them untouchable and thus conserving them; others pass on situations, by making them practicable and thus liquidating them. The latter are called the destructive. The destructive character has the consciousness of historical man, whose deepest emotion is an insuperable mistrust of the course of things and a readiness at all times to recognize that everything can go wrong. Therefore, the destructive character is reliability itself" (*SW 2:* 542).

opened by the Romantic encounter with philosophy; as such, one can approach his texts hieroglyphically as the presentation of his own metaphysical-philosophical program.

In the previous section, Benjamin's affinity with the *Frühromantik* "subject-less" model of reflection was described: such a framework allowed both Benjamin and the early Romantics to move beyond the limits of Kantian epistemology and the subjective Idealist starting point for philosophy. This section will further explore Benjamin's emergent metaphysical commitments, specifically his proto-Schellingian *Naturphilosophie*, by situating Benjamin within debates regarding the status of metaphysics in the post-Kantian paradigm. The emergent life sciences in the Romantic-Idealist period ushered in new "organic" understandings of nature, along with naturalistic models of philosophical grounding, both of which sought to return philosophy to (neo) Platonic metaphysical conceptions of science (4.2.1). These debates regarding the status of metaphysics after Kant actively engaged the *Frühromantiker*, Goethe, Fichte, Hölderlin, Hegel and Schelling, and in criticizing such thinkers, Benjamin enters the "force-field" of their concerns. This section also marks the appearance of Schelling, a thinker with whom Benjamin has a warranted speculative affinity, given that both thinkers grant a constitutive metaphysical role to "nature" in their movement beyond subjective Idealism (4.2.2).

## 4.2.1 Beyond Kant and Subjective Idealism: The Genesis of *Naturphilosophie*

> "I can think of no more pitiful workday occupation than such an application of abstract principles to an already existing empirical science. My object, rather, is first to allow natural science itself to *arise* philosophically, and my philosophy is itself nothing else than natural science." Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature,* 5.

Kant's "Copernican revolution" attempted to abolish ungrounded metaphysical conjecture, allowing speculative questions pertaining to "pure reason"—the postulates of "the Ideas" of God, Freedom, and Immortality (*CPR,* 407)— "problematic" or "regulative" status: they are permitted as necessary fictions in order to ground the causal regress of Kantian consciousness (*CPR,* 409). For Kant, metaphysics, as the creation of "synthetic a priori judgments," can be pursued only negatively provided it remain within the intuitions and concepts of experience, and it is ordered towards the goal of grounding the causal nexus of the understanding, thus securing the possibility of morality. Despite Kant's bureaucratic prohibitions and his rigid academic "division of labour" (*Conflict,*

23), Iain Hamilton Grant underscores the importance of the Kantian "territory" for subsequent thinkers: "'Kant' remains the name of an upheaval in modern philosophy, a seismic shift so intense as to shift the terrain on which philosophy is conducted" (59). Notwithstanding the ambiguous discussions of "organicism" and "natural teleology" in sections 64-6 and 75-9 of the *CPJ* (242-49, 268-284), in the critical program Kant essentially abandoned the study of nature to the Netwonian mechanistic-causal paradigm. For Kant, nature could not be known in any metaphysical or ontological sense, and speculation should be restricted to the discrete categories of the subject. Fichte went further than Kant, wholly excising nature as a meaningful site from philosophy. For Fichte, Kant's true aim lay in the redemption of the domain of ethics via practical reason, and as such, nature becomes a mere background upon which human freedom is actualized. The major challenge to this subjective Idealist banishment of nature came in the form of the emergent *Naturphilosophie,* a fundamental moment in the movement towards "objective" absolute Idealism (Beiser, *Hegel*, 104-109; *Idealism,* 483-490).[216]

New movements in both the physical and life sciences (such as biology, chemistry, galvanism) presented challenges to the Kantian-Netwonian paradigm, questioning the extent to which nature could be conceptualized under the determinist causal assumptions of the Newtonian world view, while provoking speculation as to the need for more "naturalistic" theoretical assumptions. As Krell stresses, for Kant, the question of "nature" remained a "tangle" against which he erected his architectonic as a "desperately contrived bulwark against the dire forces of nature," so as to preserve the intelligible realm of "freedom" or practical reason (*Contagion,* 11).[217] However, particularly in the *CPJ,* where Kant had the more systematic ambition of unifying the domains of "nature" and "freedom" through the subjective "faculty" of judgment, questions of organicism and natural-teleology contaminate the architectonic unity of the

[216] More will be said regarding this absolute Idealism in part 3 of this project dealing with Hegel and Schelling.

[217] Krell argues that post-Kantian thought can be seen as an opening of the Kantian architectonic to the forces of "contingency, ambiguity, and nature," all of which are denied by Kant's capitulation to architectonic unity in order to save morality: "[Kant] reverts willy-nilly to human reason, the regulative idea, the noumenon, and the moral law, or to intention, final purpose, and the super-sensuous substrate, in order to combat contingency" (*Contagion,* 11).

critical program (*CPJ,* 3-14, 41-46). This ambiguity of nature—which Krell has termed a "contagion" (*Contagion,* 2-3)—decenters the foundational Cartesian-Kantian epistemic subject, opening it to a variety of natural-historical forces such that reason becomes porous and other to itself.  Schelling's work, in addition to being the apex of *Naturphilosophie,* undercuts the stability of Kantian thought by way of its own disregarded phantasms, the most notable of which is organic nature. With such encounters, Schelling allows for naturalist, though non-reductive models of philosophical grounding to be explored.

The "fate of reason" after Kant's critical project does not become a dogmatically adhered to "highway" in which metaphysics and skepticism are abolished, but rather, the deeply contested and ambiguous terrain of Idealism-Romanticism, which tested and experimented with the terminology laid down by Kant (Beiser, *Reason,* 1-7; *CPR,* 704). German Idealism should be seen as inhabiting this Kantian "territory" (Grant, 59), working within the "force-field" (Adorno, *Kant,* 4) of its problematics: tarrying with questions relating to the transcendental and other models of philosophical grounding, along with the status of metaphysics after the Kantian critique. Likewise, Benjamin and Adorno continue such a meta-critical working through of the Kantian program, though from the perspective of their twentieth-century.

## 4.2.2 Schelling (Speculatively)

"Reality is inherently fragile...Therein resides Schelling's fundamental motif: what we experience as 'reality' is constituted and maintains itself through a proper balance between two antagonistic forces, with the ever-present danger that one of the two sides will 'be cracked,' run out of control and thus destroy the 'impressions of reality.' Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder,* 24.

Benjamin's understanding of nature as containing "infinite centers of reflection" (*SW 1:* 119) has an evident affinity with Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* (to 1801), which sees the subject as a difference in degree, not of kind, from the productivity of nature, as expressing the maximum "potency" of its self-reflection (*FO,* 33-34, 54). [218]  In his early writings on the philosophy of nature, Schelling attempted to systematize many elements

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[218] "*Naturphilosophie*" can be defined as an attempt to ground the absolute-Idealist "subject-object identity...not in the self-consciousness of the ego [as Fichte and Kant], but in the single universal substance [such as nature or organism]" (Beiser, *Idealism*, 506). *Naturphilosophie* endeavoured to "explain life and the mind on a naturalistic yet non-mechanistic foundation" (Beiser, *Idealism,* 508).

of his Romantic milieu, and according to Beiser, should be considered the "apex" of absolute Idealism (Beiser, *Idealism,* 465-468). With his break from his earlier Fichtean proclivities (around 1799-1802 [Beiser, *Idealism* 491-505]), Schelling definitively rejects the "subjective Idealism"—or the foundational primacy of epistemology—that marked the Kantian-Fichtean paradigm. Schelling usurps the constitutive epistemic subject from its position of primacy, making the human one circle of reflection among many, the highest reflective manifestation of the productivity that is nature.[219] In a similar manner, Benjamin's "coming philosophy" sought to move away from the static mythology of subjective enlightenment, considering modes of philosophical grounding beyond both subject and object. Due to such affinities, Benjamin and Schelling can be placed in speculative constellation with each other, regardless of the explicit presence or absence of Schelling in Benjamin's texts, or philological evidence that Benjamin "read" Schelling. Both thinkers inhabit the same post-Kantian "force-field," engaging in similar debates regarding the continuing efficacy of the Kantian framework, along with meta-critical debates which sought to theorize philosophy in an expanded manner.

Apropos of Schelling in relation to Benjamin's dissertation, Menninghaus has noted the "polemical absence" of Schelling "throughout, up to, and including the bibliography" (37). Menninghaus speculates that despite such a textual absence, Benjamin considers Schelling under erasure: given that much of the Romantic literature Benjamin consulted for the project interpreted Schelling alongside Schlegel and Novalis, along with the more general Schellingian tone of Benjamin's anti-Fichteanism.[220]

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[219] It is a mistake to see *Naturphilosophie* as totally opposed to transcendental philosophy, or as abandoning the subject totally in favour of some vitalist-irrationalism or materialism. *Naturphilosophie* still poses the transcendental question as to how experience is possible, though it attempts to explain both nature, and one's experience of it, according to a single principle (Beiser, *Idealism*, 510-11). For Schelling, this entails recognizing the transcendental subject as the "highest-potency" of nature, blurring the subjective-Idealist distinction between the form and content of knowledge, and transgressing Kant's proviso that one thinks organicism in a merely "regulative" sense (See also, Grant, 65-8).

[220] Menninghaus speculates that Benjamin was, "forgoing any explicit discussion of Schelling so as not to compromise his exposition" (38). Despite this, Menninghaus notes that evident thematic affinities exist on questions of "intellectual intuition," and their general movement beyond "subjective Idealism." Despite such an affinity, Menninghaus questions the centrality Benjamin accords to the Fichtean influence upon the *Frühromantiker,* along with his "simplistic" gloss of the problem of intuition and reflection: "Benjamin's 'deduction' of the immediacy of reflection is too simplistic by far, and the level it works on—which is unrepresentative of the extent of the problem's consideration within Romantic philosophy—is more apt to draw out contradictory conclusions" (23). However, for Menninghaus, despite his conceptual errors and

Following Menninghaus' analysis, I deem Schelling to be "worthy of consideration as absence" (37) in relation to Benjamin, though in an unbounded and speculative sense, given that both thinkers sought to move beyond the subjective Idealism of the Kantian Fichtean paradigm. Thinking Benjamin in constellation with Schelling will allow the full Idealist contours of Benjamin's mortuary vision of Romanticism to emerge, a model in which nature is considered as a transient "*Ungrund*" against which all thought must test itself.

According to Schelling, the path beyond the Fichtean constitutive subject necessitated viewing the subject as the "ideal" summit of natural forces (Schelling, *FO,* xxvii, 33). Thus, "nature" should not be seen as "a separate inaccessible thing in itself...because it is also at work in the subject, as that which moves the subject beyond itself" (Bowie, 36). In *Naturphilosophie* the subject is deterritorialized as a privileged philosophical locus, becoming one "center of reflection" amongst many: a "whirlpool" in the broader stream that is the "productivity of nature" (*SW 1:* 119; *FO,* 18). For Grant, Schelling can be seen as a thinker who elaborates a "materiality of ideation" (45): a naturalistic understanding of philosophy not as some pure Idealist logical deduction, but rather, as a "natural history of mind" (Schelling, *Ideas*, 30). Likewise, Benjamin troubles the stability of thought with his search for a domain of "neutrality between subject and object" (*SW 1:* 104), though for Benjamin such a domain becomes language thought in an expressivist and mimetic manner. Alluding to such a mystical affinity between nature and language, Benjamin will write: "Only nature cannot be unveiled, for it preserves a mystery so long as God lets it exist. Truth is discovered in the essence of language" (*SW1:* 353). As I have argued, language allegorically figures the ur-transience that is nature by way of the historical progression or translation of "languages" into each other.

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textual violence, Benjamin's derivation of the essence of romanticism remained "largely valid" with some minor incursions of "marginal violence" (51). For Menninghaus, such textual violence is better understood if one sees Benjamin as employing the *Frühromantiker* as an occasion to work out his own philosophy of language (28). More remains to be said regarding the relationship between Benjamin and Bloch, who has been described by Habermas as a "Schellingian Marxist." Given Benjamin's intellectual dialogue with Bloch around questions of utopia, one can see Benjamin as engaging with several Schellingian-Idealist motifs, in relation to which he elaborates his own views (see *SW 3:* 305-6; *BC,* 146-8, 159-60, 246-7). Benjamin also cites a photograph of Schelling in his "Little History of Photography" (*SW 2:*513).

As has also been argued, within Benjamin's work one can see the development of a "tragic" or negative notion of the absolute, one associated with "nature, fate, myth, [and] more generally the profane" (Gasché, "Sober," 57). Such a mortuary metaphysic emerges by way of a dialogue with the mythical and "telluric" moments Benjamin locates within Goethe's thought, and culminates in the melancholic transient conception of nature figured in the *Trauerspiel.* With such a mortuary vision, Benjamin forms an affinity with Schelling's middle *Freedom* essay (1809), which describes "the veil of dejection that is spread over all nature, the deep indestructible melancholy of all life" (*FE,* 63). Echoing such sentiments, Žižek (in *The Indivisible Remainder*) positions Schelling's middle thought as perpetually "antagonistic": depicting an ur-history of transience, or "abyss of freedom," pervaded by motifs of fragility, interruption, and non-identity (*Indivisible,* 24, 28). Schelling's work will be considered in more depth in Chapter 5 of this project, though Schelling's absolute Idealism provides a speculative site through which to think Benjamin's metaphysical commitments, and as such, much more remains to be said regarding this connection.

### 4.2.3 Goethe: Nature and Mythology

"This study rests upon an ambiguity—sometimes naïve, sometimes doubtless more mediated—in the concept of nature." Benjamin, "Goethe's *Elective Affinities*" *SW 1*: 314.

Benjamin's 1921-2 essay on Goethe's 1809 *Elective Affinities* [*Wahlverwandtschaften*] provides a speculative reading of Goethe's late text, while also serving as an occasion for the provisional fashioning of Benjamin's immanent model of criticism, which he continues to elaborate in dialogue with various textual objects (Caygill, 46-7). One can further read the essay as allegorizing many of Benjamin's latent metaphysical suppositions, specifically the "ur-history" of a transitory mythological image of natural history that will emerge more forcefully in his *Trauerspiel* study.[221]

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[221] Buck-Morss argues that Goethe's notion of "*ur-phänomen*" plays a fundamental role in Benjamin's own formulation of "ur-history" (*Dialectics,* 71-2, 211, 217-9). For Goethe, ur-phenomenal archetypes represent material instantiations of Platonic ideas which (re)emerge through the experimental-empirical study of nature (see, Goethe, *Plants,* xvii xvii, 105n 23). Via Simmel, Buck-Morss speculates that such a notion allowed Benjamin to synthesize the ideal and material domains (*Dialectics,* 72). In his Goethe essay, Benjamin accords an important role to art and aesthetics in discovering such ur-phenomenal archetypes: "only in the domain of art do the ur-phenomena—as ideals—present themselves adequately to perception,

Benjamin reads Goethe's novel as a metaphysical space in which "nature itself, in the hands of human actors, grows superhumanly active" (*SW 1:* 303). The characters in the novel, along with their respective marital relations decay under the sway of "elective affinities": that "particular harmony of the deeper natural strata" (*SW 1:* 304), forces which are awakened upon the arrival of the mythically innocent Ottilie.[222] Benjamin highlights the "tellurian element" of Goethe's work (*SW 1:* 303), echoing his own writings on Bachofen (*SW 1:* 349), Kafka (*SW 2:* 794), and *The Arcades*, which describe a modern world still in the grip of subterranean mythological forces, a realm of "fate" governing human relations (*SW 1:* 308-9).[223]  In the novel, just as Eduard and Charlotte are set to consummate their marriage—entering into the Kantian  "Kingdom of ends" that is ethical marriage –fate is visited upon them: "at the height of their cultivation, however, they are subject to the forces that cultivation claims to have mastered, even if it may forever prove impotent to cub them" (*SW 1:* 304). Benjamin sees Eduard and Charlotte as "torn out of the path of marriage in order to find their essence under other laws" (*SW 1:* 348).

Benjamin's juxtaposition of the Kantian ethical notion of marriage against that of Goethe reveals his broader critique of the primacy of practical reason: Goethe's text is not a moral fable affirming the sanctity of marriage, but rather a grim tale of "natural fate." As Benjamin asserts, "It is a question here not of ethical guilt...but rather [guilt] of the natural kind, which befalls human beings not by decision, but by negligence and celebration" (*SW 1*: 308). In this way, Benjamin reads "the mythic" as the real "truth-

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whereas in science they are replaced by the idea, which is capable of illuminating the object of perception but never of transforming it in intuition. The ur-phenomena do not exist before art; they subsist within it" (*SW 1:* 315). Analytically speaking, Goethe's novel tells the story of the degeneration of Eduard and Charlotte's relationship, as each is drawn—chemically via elective affinities—to Ottilie and the Captain respectively. The conflicts of the novel eventually lead to a tragic end with the death of the youthful Ottilie.
[222] Situating Goethe's text within the broader context of the "contagion" of philosophy, by which the degenerative moments of nature are reckoned with philosophically, Krell writes, "Goethe's later *Wahlverwandtschaften,* composed in 1808-9, was to show that the chemistry of love could be deadly, that even a landscaped nature was never truly domesticated, never truly deprived of its daimonic force, and that human nature in particular resisted trimming and taming" (*Contagion*, 5). Resounding upon such sentiments, Benjamin describes Goethe's text as "a book in which nature has become alive, human, and companionable" (*SW 1:* 314).
[223] Benjamin positions Ottilie's death as a mythical sacrifice to the telluric world of myth and fate: "it is the sacrifice for the expiation of the guilty ones...atonement through the 'death of the innocent'" (*SW 1:* 308-9).

content" of Goethe's text, beyond the mere surface "material-content" of the morality-marriage play (*SW 1:* 309). Benjamin situates Goethe's text in dialogue with his scientific studies, specifically Goethe's work on magnetism, his "Theory of Colours" and the "Metamorphosis of Plants," texts which illustrate the "ambivalence Goethe feels toward nature" (*SW 1:* 315; Krell, *Contagion,* 3). Against the abstract Idealism of his contemporary Schiller, Goethe upheld a mythological empiricism, a "tender empiricism which becomes intimately identical with its object and thereby becomes actual theory" (*Maxims*, 565), a model of thought which immerses itself in the ambiguity of nature and the sensuous particularity of experience (Krell, *Contagion,* 5; Charles, 25-39). Benjamin is drawn to this "daemonic character" of Goethe's novel— "the incomprehensible ambivalence of nature" (*SW 1:* 316)—that Benjamin critically excavates as the "truth-content" of *Elective Affinities*.

Through Goethe's text Benjamin allegorizes his own metaphysical suppositions, depicting a world view in which the "word of reason" should be "reckoned to the credit of nature" (*SW 1:* 315). "Myth"—or nature and its dynamic processes—must be regarded as a necessary *a priori* for all philosophical reflection, anticipating the transient metaphysics of Benjamin's notion of "natural history." Against Fichte, and the transcendent religiosity of many *Frühromantiker,* Benjamin undercuts the spontaneity of "freedom" by way of the fated necessity of mythology. The "free" actions of Goethe's characters only hasten their further destruction; however, virginal Ottilie's alliance with the necessity of her fate seemingly wins her a "semblance of reconciliation" (*SW 1:* 348). With a "plant-like muteness," Ottilie willingly goes to her death, refusing to speak, which would make her death into a tragedy (*SW 1:* 336, 335-7). Instead, Ottilie's wordless alliance with fate makes Goethe's text a belated *Trauerspiel,* shrouded in the "aura of Hades" (*SW 1:* 339). The novel does not present a stage for the enlightenment realization of freedom, but rather a grim parable in which the "dark transgression" of the characters "demands its dark expiation" (*SW 1:* 343).

As Schelling argues in his despondent *Freedom* essay (1809), published in the same year as Goethe's novel, the Kantian antinomy between "freedom and necessity" disappears within the broader absolute progression that is the productive genesis of nature (4, 10-11, 50). Benjamin likewise posits a darker deterministic and natural force

pervading all of life. In a characteristic negative theological reversal, Benjamin allegorizes Ottilie's death as a "semblematic" experience of reconciliation, "that most paradoxical, most fleeting hope finally emerges from the semblance of reconciliation, just as, at twilight, as the sun is extinguished, rises the evening star which outlasts the night" (*SW 1:* 355, 354). Such a paradoxical fleeting image of hope, like a shooting star or "firework" (Adorno, *AT,* 28, 81), is all that is granted as reprieve from such mythical fates. Benjamin famously signs off his Goethe essay in Kafkaesque fashion: "only for the sake of the hopeless ones have been given hope" (*SW 1:* 356). It is such a paradox— or the antinomy between the productivity of nature and the transience of reconciliation— that sets the stage for Benjamin's discussion of Baroque *Trauerspiel.*

### 4.3 *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*: Mortuary Philosophy

"He was deep in work on ~~The~~ *Origin of German Tragic Drama.* When I learned from him that it had to do with an analysis of the German Baroque tragedy from the seventeenth century, and that only a few specialists know this literature—these tragedies were never played—I made a face. Why busy oneself with dead literature?" Asja Lācis, *Revolutionär im Beruf,* 43-44 [*Sic*].

Benjamin's *Origin of the German Trauerspiel* (*Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels,* 1925/8) should be considered the "summa" of his early work, a moment of "(non) synthesis," or a reconciliation-in-difference, of the varying trajectories of his early writings (Caygill, 51; Cristache, 31-8). Key moments of Benjamin's philosophy of language, along with his critical avant-garde program for an expanded philosophy of experience (Caygill, 54), are brought together with theological, political, and historical considerations to form the fraught constellation that is Benjamin's (failed) *Habilitation*. These tensions beneath the fragmentary "mosaic" (*OT,* 3) that is the finished text overflow the restricted economy of Benjamin's *Trauerspiel*, working themselves out throughout the remainder of Benjamin's oeuvre. In such a manner, independent of the scholarly merit of Benjamin's specific analysis of Baroque plays, Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* can be approached as an allegorical cipher to his metaphysical-critical commitments.

Against the grain of much of Benjamin scholarship—which focuses on the text's "Epistemo-Critical Prologue" at the expense of a critical consideration of the body of the text—I will present Benjamin's idiosyncratic understanding of Baroque allegory, along with the entwined notion of "natural history," as the fundamental metaphysical suppositions of the work. Read in conjunction with the "theory of Ideas" in the work's

prologue, these concepts can be interpreted to reveal the metaphysics of transience operative in Benjamin's corpus. The contradiction between the shameless Platonic Idealism of the work's esoteric "Epistemo-Critical Prologue," and the body of the text, which describes the transience of all signification by way of allegory, has been repeatedly emphasized in scholarship (McCole, 149-151; Hansen, 10-11, 24-5, 82-3). However, Benjamin's prologue should not be treated in isolation, but rather, should be seen as arising out of the natural-historical metaphysics operative within the body of the text. In such a manner, Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* despite being "on" the Baroque, should be seen in constellation with other Romantic texts such as those of Nietzsche (*The Birth of Tragedy,* 1872), and Lukács (*The Theory of the Novel,* 1916), which continue to work through Idealist metaphysics—elaborating "the ruin" of the Hegelian encyclopedia—by way of the aesthetic dimension (Rajan, "Encyclopedia," 341).[224] These theorists employ literary tropes or formal genres as prisms through which to consider broader historical philosophical notions. Nietzsche fashions the "Apollonian" and "Dionysian" elements of Greek theatre as prisms through which to consider Greek philosophical-political culture (*Birth,* 103-109, 139-144, 33-52). While Lukács utilizes the historical-critical genres of "the epic" and "the novel": the former of which he reads as a rebus to the "transcendental *loci*" of Greek immediacy, with "the novel" speaking to the emergent "modern" alienation (*Novel,* 29-40, 56-69, 84-93). For Benjamin, allegory becomes a similar means by which to illuminate the disenchanted world of the German Baroque.

The *Trauerspiel* presents the culmination of what I have term Benjamin's own mortuary vision of Romanticism, with its profane, or "absconded" understanding of the absolute (Hansen & Benjamin, 5): one that emphasizes ruin, decay, and transience over and against the providence of enlightenment narratives. Such a Romantic form of

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[224] As Rajan continues, "the encyclopedia, or its persistence as a deliberately broken down circle, can be seen in the work of Walter Benjamin, Georg Lukács, Ernst Bloch, Georg Simmel and others. These post-Hegelian thinkers microcosmically develop only parts of Hegel's encyclopedia, as...Lukács who develops his theory of the novel as the loss of epic totality out of the sections on Romanticism in Hegel's *Aesthetics*" ("Encyclopedia," 341). The Romantic nature of Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* is further exemplified by its dialogue with Nietzsche's 1866 romantic text *The Birth of Tragedy* (*OT,* 94-99, 102-3). Both thinkers sought to critically elaborate metaphysical positions by way of a dialogue with literary forms. Benjamin was persistently engaged with Nietzsche's work in this early period, as is exemplified by his correspondence (see *BC,* 20, 50, 66, 107, 123, 127-8, 137).

philosophy has much in common with the darker Romantic Idealism of Schelling, and Benjamin's allegorical form for philosophy should be seen as a similar response to the "groundless ground" that is nature (*FE,* 68-9). The "aesthetic of ruination" pursued by Benjamin throughout the text is upheld by many commentators as being characteristically "modern" (Caygill, 60; Newman, 7-11; Wolin, 75-77; Weber, 131-63).  However, it should be emphasized that Benjamin sees such motifs of ruination and disenchantment as prefigured in both Romanticism and the Baroque.[225] In this way, the ur-inhabitant of the Lukácsian "grand-hotel abyss" is not Adorno, but Benjamin, who should be seen as the originator of the melancholic temperament pervading so much of Frankfurt School Critical Theory. Such a temperament is not simply a subjective melancholic nihilism, but rather, a form of intellectual intuition which reveals transience as the *archē* of all things.

Both Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* and Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* should be seen as fragmentary romantic texts (as I have argued in 1.4). Though "finished" in the sense of being brought to publication, these texts have a deliberately ruinous mosaic quality, allowing them to be experimentally unbound and re-constellated in novel directions. Further, following Adorno's theses on "form" (1.4.1.), philosophy must incorporate ruination into its very form so as to express metaphysical conceptions of ephemerality, and it is Benjamin's notion of allegory which allows for such a confrontation of philosophy with natural history. As Benjamin writes, "allegories are to thoughts what ruins are in the realm of things" (*OT,* 188).

### 4.3.1 The 'Origins' of Benjamin's Trauerspiel

"Capitalism is entirely without precedent, in that it is a religion which offers not the reform of existence but its complete destruction. It is the expansion of despair, until despair becomes a religious state of the world in the hope that this will lead to salvation." Benjamin, "Capitalism as Religion," *SW 1:* 289.

A central moment of Benjamin's "Epistemo-Critical Prologue" lies in its speculative rethinking of the category of "origin" [*Ur-sprung*], which Benjamin is careful to differentiate from "genesis" or "emergence" [*Entstehen*], while further distinguishing

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[225] The full modernist implications of Benjamin's Romantic aesthetic of ruination are worked out in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* (see *AT,* 44-45 56, 116, 145-6, 205, 299, 310-11, 333).

his own "historical-philosophical" method from both the Idealist and historicist

programs. As he writes:

> Origin [*Ur-Sprung*], although a thoroughly historical category, nevertheless has
> nothing in common with genesis [or emergence—*Entstehung*]. By "origin" is meant
> not the coming-to-be of what has originated but rather what originates
> [*Entsprungenen*] in the becoming and passing away. The origin stands as an eddy [or
> maelstrom—*Strudel*] in the stream of becoming and vigorously draws the emerging
> material into its rhythm. In the naked, manifest existence of the factual, the origin
> never allows itself to be recognized; its rhythm stands open only to a dual insight. On
> the one hand, it demands to be recognized as restoration, restitution, and on the other
> hand—and precisely on account of this, as something incomplete and unclosed.
> Determining itself in every origin-phenomenon is the formation in which, again and
> again, an idea confronts the historical world, until it lies there in the totality of its
> history. The origin, then does not arise from the facts attested but concerns their fore-
> and after-history. (*OT,* 25; *GS* 1: 226)[226]

"Origin" is not a purely historical or material textual occurrence, nor is it purely ideal, but

rather, origin arises out of the speculative grouping of materials in constellation by way

of criticism—via gestures of "profane-illumination." "Origins" are continually re-

inscribed by way of historical critical analysis and texts which come before and after

them. Benjamin describes the "natural history" [*natürliche Geschichte*], or the "after life"

[*Nachleben*], of works in terms of their "pre-and post-history" [*Vor- und Nach-

geschichte*] (*OT*, 25, 27; *GS 1:* 226-228): that is, the work continues to evolve (or live on)

by way of texts which come after it, while it continually gives new senses to works which

came prior to it (Weber, 133-139).

Reflexively, this conception of "origin" can be applied to speculate upon the

"origins" of Benjamin's own *Trauerspiel* book, critically performing one of the text's

central methodological innovations.[227] Biographically, Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* book was

authored primarily on the Greek island of Capri throughout 1924, where Benjamin

traveled with some "600 quotations collected," in order to complete the text in solitude

(*BC,* 236). During this productive stay, financial and personal concerns forced a return to

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[226] Schelling employs the same motif of the stream in his *First Outline,* to describe the "universal duality"
of nature in terms of "productivity" and "products" (18, 206). This duality of nature will be explored
further in Ch. 5. Both Benjamin and Schelling present natural-historical hybrid concepts to make
philosophical articulations.

[227] Buck-Morss, in *The Dialectics of Seeing*, has undertaken a similar reflexive-immanent application of
Benjamin's category of origin, though with respect to the *Passagen-Werk* (8-43)*.*

Berlin in 1925, whereupon the text was ultimately finished, only to be rejected as a *Habilitation* by *Frankfurt Universität* in July of 1925 (*BC,* 252, 275). Benjamin's completed text is at once uncompromising in its methodological innovation, though simultaneously shaped by personal, historical and academic concerns. As such, the *Trauerspiel* can be said to have a polyphony of "origins" spanning the entirety of Benjamin's early academic career, along with his personal intellectual experiences, all of which are brought together in the tensioned mosaic that is Benjamin's *Trauerspiel*. In what follows I will articulate the natural history of Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* in terms of its "pre and post history."

"Pre-historically" (*OT,* 25) , the *Trauerspiel's* frontispiece declares, "Conceived in 1916, written 1925," bringing it into dialogue with Benjamin's early fragment "On Language" (1916) along with other fragments which speculated on the relationship between language and the Baroque.[228]  This relationship is further reinforced by the fact that at key moments in the argument, specifically surrounding the development of his theory of allegory, Benjamin directly cites or un-subtly rephrases his early writings on language and translation (*OT,* 13-15, 26, 244, 256). Further, the *OT* also continues Benjamin's project for a philosophy of criticism inaugurated by his dissertation and continued in his Goethe study, though given an even darker and more pessimistic cast. Instead of "poeticizing" the work within the broader continuum of the absolute (or the medium of forms), in the *Trauerspiel,* "criticism" comes to be seen as "the mortification of works" (*OT,* 193).

In this way, the *OT* continues Benjamin's immanent critique of the Early Romantics, which allows for the development of his own mortuary vision of Romanticism, to the extent that Benjamin's text should be seen as not simply about the Baroque, but rather, as providing an occasion for the development of Benjamin's own fractured vision of Romanticism. It is possible to describe Benjamin's "Epistemo-Critical

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[228] While authoring "On Language as Such" (1916), Benjamin also penned two fragments, "*Trauerspiel* and Tragedy" and "Language in *Trauerspiel* and Tragedy" (*SW 1:* 55-61). These fragments speak not only to Benjamin's early interest in the *Trauerspiel* form, but also reveal the proximity of such research to his philosophy of language. These fragments provisionally sketch several themes that will recur in his *Habilitation,* notably the mourning of nature, along with the deferring and allegorical language of the *Trauerspiel,* which distinguishes it from the heroic closure of tragedy (see Caygill, 53-4).

Prologue" as a methodological-critical statement of sorts, a "prologue to epistemology dressed up as a theory of ideas," notwithstanding Benjamin's labeling it "unmitigated chutzpah" to Scholem, (*BC,* 261). However, as will be argued, Benjamin's prologue has been overanalyzed in remove from the body of the text, in which Benjamin immanently works out the main critical-metaphysical tenets by way of analysis of "allegory."

Politically, nationally, and religiously, the *Trauerspiel* should be seen in an ambiguous position with respect to German nationalism and nationhood. Jane Newman positions Benjamin within the broader "citational community" that was undertaking a German nationalist revival of the Baroque that attempted to re-archive the Baroque as the birth of a "singular German Modernity" (9, xv-xiv, 2; 7-9, 19-20, 22, 101). Related to such national questions is Benjamin's relationship with the Protestant theologian, Florens Christian Rang, with whom Benjamin entered into a lengthy correspondence regarding key moments of the work's argumentation, specifically, in relation to the idea of Greek tragedy as an "agon" or "contest" (*BC,* 231-5), the particular "Protestant character" of the German Baroque (*BC,* 215-216), along with key methodological formulations of the theory of "the Idea" (*BC,* 225-6; cf., Caygill, 52, 56). Benjamin repeatedly stresses the "enormous significance" (*BC,* 225) of their dialogues for the text, such that upon Rang's death Benjamin lamented the loss of the work's "ideal reader" (*BC,* 262, 252-3). Politically, the first section of the text, "Trauerspiel and Tragedy," establishes the Baroque historical-political context by drawing extensively on the work of Carl Schmitt, whose political-theological formulations Benjamin both employs and criticizes (*OT,* 48-52, 55-7; 72).[229] Though Benjamin should be understood politically as a theological-anarchist, both thinkers share similar mystical-theologically notions of the political.

"Post-historically" (*OT,* 25), Benjamin repeatedly acknowledges the affinities of his project with historical- materialism (*BC,* 243, 253, 257), principally with that of Lukács, a thinker whose insights Benjamin saw as largely "validat[ing] his own thinking"

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[229] G. Agamben has traced the nuances and complexities of the encounter between Benjamin and Schmitt as it relates to Benjamin's broader considerations of politics. See "Gigantomachy Concerning the Void" in *The State of Exception* (52-64).

(*BC,* 248).[230] The close proximity of Benjamin's *Trauerspiel*, specifically its notion of allegory, with his later *Arcades Project,* particularly its discussions of the "commodity form," has been well documented in scholarship (Buck-Morss, *Dialectics,* 157-201; Caygill, 60). Given the contiguity of these notions, one could speculate that Benjamin's "Marxist turn" (~1929-30) could be seen as a probing of the implications of this affinity between allegory and Marxist analysis.

Benjamin describes the melancholic as one who "goes away empty handed," one who dwells under the "sign of Saturn," contemplating transience, guilt, and failure (*OT,* 152-6, 255). Such a melancholy temperament most aptly illuminates the Baroque interiors of Benjamin's text. Despite its publication in 1928 by *Rowohlt Verlag* (*BC,* 293-5), catastrophe pervades Benjamin's *Trauerspiel,* a work which definitively marked his inability to gain entrance to the discourse of the university and begin a conventional academic career. The *Trauerspiel*, and the letters surrounding it, are marred by a hatred of orthodox academic discourse, and such an anti-university sentiment is illustrated in the uncompromisingly esoteric nature of the work's key insights, along with the "minor" character of the textual objects chosen (*BC,* 263-6; Deleuze & Guattari, *Kafka,*16-19).[231] In many respects, Benjamin's fall from the academy was fortunate, as it led him to move away from the university, immersing himself instead in the media and allegories of the everyday. Despite his assertion to Scholem apropos of his failure to pass his *Habilitation*, "All in all I am glad" (*BC,* 276), Benjamin continued to dwell in such an ethos of failure— "under the sign of Saturn" (Sontag, "Saturn," 286)—until his death in 1940.

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[230] The relationship of historical materialism (or Marxism) to Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* deserves further consideration. Whilst composing the text Benjamin engaged extensively with Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* and *Soul and Form,* likely at the urging of his communist lover A. Lācis. His letters throughout the work's composition reveal a growing sympathy to Marxist politics and theoretical questions (*BC,* 243, 248 257, 279). Later, in 1931, Benjamin writes to Rychner regarding the "dialectical-materialist" affinities with his *Trauerspiel* (*BC,* 372). Perhaps most notably, in his 1937 essay on Eduard Fuchs, Benjamin retranslates much of his "epistemo-critical" methodology —specifically the ideas of the "pre- and post-history of the work"— in explicitly Marxist terms via a dialogue with Engels (see *SW 3:* 261-3, 267-8). Many of these historiographical formulations are further re-constellated in Benjamin's 1940 "Theses on the Concept of History." In this manner, the *Trauerspiel* has much in common with Lukács' 1916 *Theory of the Novel,* both texts emerge out of the atrophies of WWI, and though they analyze literary forms, are able to be repurposed in Marxist-materialist directions.

[231] "Minor literature" involves the nomadic "minor" invasion of a "major language," the "deteritorialization" of a discourse it by way of its margins, or minor, non-identical moments, allowing for reflection upon the whole major discourse (Deleuze & Guattari, *Kafka,* 16).

## 4.3.2 Natural History: The Metaphysics of Transience

"For nature is messianic by reason of its eternal and total passing away." Benjamin, "Theological Political Fragment," *SW 3:* 306.

Benjamin's ambivalent notion of "natural history," or his metaphysical understanding of transience, should be seen as the key contribution of his *Trauerspiel* study. Hansen articulates two tensioned senses of the term "natural history" occurring in Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* text (10). The first, "*natürliche Geschichte*," articulates the "specific historic mode that typifies the work of art," and is detailed in the "Epistemo-Critical Prologue," where Benjamin describes the "non-human topos" (10), or "life" of works of art in terms of their "pre and post-history," which according to Benjamin is "a mark of their redemption or their gathering into the preserve of the world of ideas, not pure but natural history" (*OT,* 26).[232] The second sense, "*Naturgeschichte/Natur-Geschichte*," corresponds to the body of the text, and acts as a critical hermeneutic through which Benjamin seeks to "unlock the historic disposition of the Baroque" out of a disenchanted space in which history has becomes "de-historicized" (Hansen, 10) or, as Benjamin puts it, "spatialized," becoming "transposed into the setting" (*OT,* 81). In this second sense, history is allegorized and read as a "cipher" out of seemingly petrified, or natural objects (Adorno, *NH,* 262, 265). In a similar vein, Hegel describes nature as a "petrified intelligence," a domain in which *Spirit* is conditionally "presaged" (*PN,* 14-15, 3). Though evident affinities exist between Benjamin's two senses, they cannot be synthesized into a single definitive conceptual articulation, but rather, natural history should be understood as a constellation of entities— "nature, history, signification, transience" (Hansen, 16)—held together in "non-synthesis" (Cristache, 31-8, 198, 229).[233]

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[232] Hansen reads Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* as the articulation of such an ethico-theological model for "another kind of history...one no longer purely anthropocentric in nature or anchored solely in the concerns of a human subject" (48). For Hansen, such an ethics is illustrated by Benjamin's discussions of natural history, specifically his pantheistic bestowal of agency upon non-human objects, along with his continual calls for the redemption of "creaturely life." This possibility of an ethics of "creaturely life" is articulated in more depth—in relation to Benjamin, R.M. Rilke, W.G. Sebald (and Agamben)—in Santer's *On Creaturely Life* (1-41, 79-95).

[233] In a similar manner, though apropos of Adorno's employment of the term, Penksy has described "Natural history" as a "theoretical promissory note," a "methodological proposal" (232), or even an allegorical "way of seeing" which provides insight into the transience of all things (231-6). Likewise, for Benjamin, the second allegorical sense of the term is not a consistent or reproducible philosophical concept,

Following Hansen, this doubled sense of the term will be recognized, and my exegesis will proceed by way of the body of the text (thus via the second allegorical notion), following which, I will demonstrate how the former sense (related to the theory of Ideas in the "Prologue") arises immanently out of the metaphysical presuppositions Benjamin locates in the Baroque. In scholarship on Benjamin's *Trauerspiel*, the work's prologue is often upheld as the capstone of Benjamin's early thought (as in Caygill, 54, Buck-Morss, *Origin,* 21-3), downplaying a substantial analysis of Benjamin's theory of allegory, along with the metaphysical doctrine of transience subtending it. This second sense of the term can be further elaborated by way of its "post-historical" development at the hands of Adorno, who first understood the critical efficacy of Benjamin's *Trauerspiel,* though it is important to first locate the "origins" of Benjamin's discussion of the term.

The constellation "natural–history" has a long lineage in German–Idealist-Romanticism (Rajan, "Natural History," 187-196). In his *FO,* Schelling strives to develop *Naturgeschichte*—which, in its Kantian employment presented a mere "description" of nature—into "*eine Gechichte der Natur*," a proper "history of Nature itself...as it gradually brings forth the whole multiplicity of its products through a deviation from a common ideal" (53). One should note the enlightened optimism in such a task: if nature progresses upward towards the absolute, so too should history, as humanity is positioned as the providential destiny of larger "natural" developments (Kant's "Universal History" is exemplary in this regard, 41-54). Benjamin's notion of natural history pushes back on such enlightened optimism, allying instead with transience—with "nature, ruin and trauma" (Rajan, "Natural History," 187)—while nonetheless remaining within the Idealist-Romantic fold, charting a counter-enlightenment "natural-historical" vision (Adorno, *ND,* 300-7).

Benjamin employs the term *Naturgeschichte* to describe the "boundless despair" of the German Baroque: one confronts an epoch under the "unshakeable domination" of the Christian counter-reformation (*OT,* 65). Such a bleak political outlook, coupled with

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but rather, an affective melancholy temperament, or "way of seeing" which provides on with an intellectual intuition into his metaphysics of transience.

the disenchanted world of Protestantism, resulted in a dark horizon of "no eschatology," or "restoration theology on earth" (*OT,* 48, 67).[234] Apropos of such a grim political-existential horizon, in which tragedy was so recurrent that it came to be seen as "natural," Benjamin writes: "the constantly repeated spectacle of the rise and fall of princes, the patient endurance of honorable virtue, stood before the eyes of the writers less as morality than as the natural side of the historical process, essential in its constancy" (*OT,* 76).

Such a brutal sentimentality, mirrored in the violent subject matter of many of the plays, greatly contributed to the scholarly neglect of the German *Trauerspiel,* leading it to being dismissed as naïve or un-enlightened. The *Trauerspiel* poets failed to transcend their own time; thus, the Baroque remained a so-called "dark-age," as opposed to the Renaissance which birthed a new global sentiment (according to theorists such as J. Burkhart). Against such readings, Benjamin argues that within the Baroque, "history passes into the setting"; that is, the "temporal process is caught up and analyzed in a spatial image" (*OT,* 81, 82). This spatialization of historical temporality— the "setting the stage of history" (Hansen, 49-50)—is read by Benjamin as a cipher to the historical experience of the Baroque, an epoch during which individuals strove to make themselves at home in a disenchanted and transient world. Benjamin read the Baroque plays as rebuses to the "natural décor of the course of history," in which dramatic actions "unfold as in the days of creation when no history was happening" (*OT,* 82, 80).[235] What is put on display in the Baroque is the "de-historicizing of history" (Hansen, 51): an experience of the loss of historical experience [*Erfahrung*].[236] One should note the correspondence of such Baroque sentiments with those of Modernity, an epoch likewise animated by  a loss of historical sense, in which historical-material forces are reified so as to appear

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[234] In his "Program," Benjamin defines a central task for a philosophy of the future as the articulation of an expanded understanding of historical experience. In the *Trauerspiel,* the critic is tasked with reading Baroque texts so as to access through experience the historical sentiment of the Baroque: "Historical life, as that epoch represents it to itself, is its content, its true object" (*OT,* 46, 48).

[235] Such motifs bear an evident affinity with Schelling, particularly his middle work: The *Weltalter* project (1811-15) and his 1809 *Freedom Essay*. These texts will be taken up more substantially in Ch. 5. of this project.

[236] Hansen positions Benjamin within early twentieth-century debates regarding historical time and the loss of historical sense (or "historicity" following Heidegger), participated in by thinkers such as Bergson, Simmel, Husserl and Heidegger (54-57).

"natural." This affinity is further underscored by Benjamin's constellation of the Baroque drama with early twentieth-century expressionism: "in both...the writers were concerned with the voicing and resonance of lament (*OT*, 36-7).

This model of reading seemingly "natural" objects as a "cipher" to history is picked up by Adorno in his 1932 essay "The Idea of Natural History." In his address, Adorno elaborates Benjamin's conception of the term in dialogue with Lukács' notion of "second nature,"[237] while developing his own critical hermeneutic—which he terms "the historical image" of "changing experimental constellations" (*AP*, 130-1, 127)—out of the antinomies in Benjamin's conception of allegory. Adorno's analysis is occasioned by a criticism of the "new ontology" of Heidegger and Husserl, a polemic which continued throughout Adorno's oeuvre, as he continually chastises ontology as a failed "attempted breakout" from the Idealist architectonic (*Lectures ND*, 65-75; *NH*, 260). Through such critiques, Adorno forwards his own "ontological reorientation of the philosophy of history" (*NH*, 260), or what can be thought as the new "historical-philosophical method" launched by the Frankfurt School (Hansen, 14-15). Against the hypostasized ontologies of his contemporaries, Adorno proclaims that philosophy must "dialectically overcome the usual antithesis of history and nature" (*NH*, 252): understanding the historical dimensions of nature, along with the "natural" (or pathological) character of history. Adorno goes on to sublate this antinomy by locating a shared moment of "transience" mediating both polarities, while affirming the new allegorical capacity awakened by such a metaphysic (*NH*, 262, 263-4). Adorno sides with Benjamin's notion of allegory against the salvific Marxist narratives of Lukács, specifically his metaphysical desire for the transcendence of the profane and disenchanted world— that "charnel-house" of long rotted interiors (*Novel*, 64). Adorno embraces Benjamin's allegorical exposure of the "ur-history of signification," and his metaphysical commitment to transience, which

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[237] Lukács defines "second-nature" in the *Theory of the Novel*, as follows: "The second nature is not dumb, sensuous and yet senseless like the first: it is a complex of senses—meanings—which has become rigid and strange, and which no longer awakens interiority; it is a charnel- house of long-dead interiorities; this second nature could only be brought to life—if this were possible—by the metaphysical act of reawakening the souls which, in an early or idea existence, created or preserved it; it can never be animated by another interior" (64). One can see how Adorno and Benjamin would both reject Lukács' transcendent calls for a "metaphysical act of reawakening," in favour of immanent affirmations of transience.

"corroded the assumption of a primary substance or *archē*, but also took leave of the metaphysical conception of nature as originary immediacy" (Adorno, *NH,* 264; Benjamin, *OT,* 135; Hansen, 16).[238] However, despite Adorno's ostensible commitment to a metaphysics of transience, his own Marxist leanings hold open the "impossible possibility" (*MM,* 247) of a minimal revolutionary transcendence maintained by the aesthetic dimension, a possibility which is denied a priori by Benjamin's baroque metaphysics (Taubes, 70-76).[239]

In Kafkaesque fashion, for Benjamin in the Baroque there will be no grand "revolutionary conviction," for the "Baroque drama knows historical activity not otherwise than as the base machination of schemers" (*OT,* 77). It is a world where heroic action is denied in advance, unlike in the tragedies of antiquity (*OT,* 115-6; Lukács, "Tragedy," 160). It is an epoch in which the realms of fate and guilt triumph to such an extent that they are naturalized as an aspect of the setting, which "intrudes more and more into the dramatic action" (*OT,* 83; 110-11).[240] Human action is failed in advance, seemingly awakening an archaic world of guilt, in which the "murderous time of irredeemable transience" will ultimately be given the "last word" (*OT,* 81, 118). Benjamin refashions a (German critic's) remark apropos of pre-Shakespearean drama's lack of definitive resolution to describe such a "ur-history" of transience: "it has no proper ending; the stream flows on" (*OT,* 136). Death will not be granted as some heroic form of closure (as in classical tragedy); instead, the "*Trauerspiel* knows no heroes, only constellations" (*OT,* 132-3). The priority of nature along with the general anti-humanism

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[238] Hansen emphasizes the radical nature of Benjamin's metaphysics of natural history vis-à-vis the philosophical tradition: "In emphasizing transience at the expense of permanence, Benjamin's concept of natural history proved to be directed against the Platonic metaphysical tradition, as well as its cover legacy in contemporary political thought" (Hansen, 82).

[239] Taubes describes Benjamin's bleak eschatological vision: "The drawbridge comes from the other side. And when you get fetched or not, as Kafka describes it, is not up to you. One can take the elevators up to the high-rises of spirituality—it won't help...there is a *prius*, an a priori. Something has to happen from the other side; *then* we see, when our eyes are pierced open. Otherwise we see nothing. Otherwise we ascend, we strive until the day after tomorrow" (*Political Theology,* 76).

[240] Describing the "natural-historical" character of fate in relation to the "guilt laden physis of Christianity" (*OT,* 247), Benjamin writes: "For fate is no purely natural occurrence, any more than it is purely historical. However, it may disguise itself in pagan, mythological guise, fate is meaningful only as a natural-historical category in the spirit of the restoration theology of the counter-reformation. It is the elemental natural force in historical occurrence, an occurrence that is itself not entirely nature because the state of Creation still reflects the sum of grace." (*OT,* 128; see Buck-Morss, *Dialectics,* 172).

of the epoch are repeatedly emphasized: it is ruled by "blind chance" and marred by an animistic form of guilt mirroring that which is located by Benjamin in *Elective Affinities* (*OT,* 132-3). The character's actions within the plays are tainted by a pathological repetition compulsion, as the parodied actions of the sovereign come to mimic the incessantly mythic rise and fall of both nature and history (*OT,* 138, 48-52). Everywhere transience, failure, and myth have the "last word."

It is within this metaphysics of transience—one which proclaims the priority of change over stasis—that Benjamin's discussion of melancholy should be understood. In the Baroque, an epoch in which "whole cities have sunk," melancholy becomes "the mood of the times" (*OT,* 144-5). Melancholy presents an attuned awareness of the "desolation," and "misery of the human condition in its creaturely state" (*OT,* 68, 149; 67)— it recognizes the "inexorable passage of every life to death" (*OT,* 155). The doctrine of melancholy should be seen as the proper affectation of the allegorist, the most "saturnine" of temperaments (*OT,* 152-3, 162). For Benjamin, melancholy becomes the affective temperament—or the Heideggerian "mood" or "attunement" (*Stimmung*, *Befindlichkeit* [*Being,* 130-38])—that provides an intellectual intuition of his transient absolute. As Benjamin writes, "Mourning is the disposition in which feeling, as though masked, reanimates the emptied-out world, so as to have an enigmatic satisfaction at the sight of it" (*OT,* 141). This melancholic disposition allows the world to "appear as [a] cipher of an enigmatic wisdom (*OT,* 143). Such a despondent temperament arises from the immersion of oneself in such a world of transience, where one finds what Schelling termed "the indestructible melancholy pervading all life" (*FE,* 63). However, through critically engaging with ephemerality, one dialectically awakens the natural-historical potential of allegory as a historically informed model of signification. As Benjamin writes, "Melancholy betrays the world for the sake of knowledge. But its preserving absorption takes the dead things up into its contemplation in order to save them" (*OT,* 162).

### 4.3.3 Allegory: The Redemption of Transience

"No recollection of transcendence is possible any more, save by way of transience; eternity appears, not as such, but diffracted through the most transient." Adorno, *ND,* 359-60.

At the core of Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* is his idiosyncratic refashioning of (Baroque) allegory, the subject of which occupies the final section of the text "Allegory and Trauerspiel" (165-258). Describing the centrality of allegory to the project, Benjamin writes: "The philosophical understanding of allegory, and the dialectical understanding of its limit form in particular, is the ground from which the image of the *Trauerspiel* stands out in vivid... beautiful colors" (*OT,* 203). Over the course of the section, Benjamin undertakes a "historical-philosophical penetration" of the allegorical form, mapping the "antinomies of the allegorical": a mode of signification—contra the timeless Idealist-Romantic "symbol"—in which "Any person, any object, any relation can signify any other whatever" (*OT,* 176, 184; McCole, 140-6). As a model of "profane illumination" (*SW 2:* 209), allegory provided Benjamin with a historically informed model of signification attuned to the ruin of transcendence, or a model of language in accord with his metaphysics of transience. Benjamin redeems the notion of allegory from the ruin of the Baroque, as its historical "truth-content," articulating it in constellation with his own theory of language as a historically informed model of signification "after the linguistic fall." Allegory becomes at once a critical hermeneutic, along with a positive theory of language—that Buck-Morss has termed a "dialectics of seeing" or a "saturnine vision" to follow Sontag (*Dialectics,* 159-200; "Saturn," 286)—recurring throughout Benjamin's corpus, notably in his *One-Way Street* (1926)*, Arcades Project,* and discussions of Baudelaire (1938-9). Benjamin expands allegory from a mere literary trope (in Goethe et al.), to a mode of thought in its own right, a "mood" (*Stimmung*), or *Weltanschauung*, pervading both the Baroque and Modernity.[241]

Hansen has described the "iconoclastic" potential of allegory within the domain of aesthetics, whereby allegory's historical index stands against a-temporal Idealist aesthetic categories such as "genius," or "the beautiful" (66; *OT,* 159). This iconoclasm

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[241] Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* arises out of a (German) late Romantic tradition from Hegel to Nietzsche that is concerned with aesthetic modes, moods, and tropes as expressing different philosophical temperaments and ways of being in the world. Nietzsche's "historical-philosophical penetration" of the Apollinian and Dionysian artistic forms, along with Hegel's description of the "Classical" and "Romantic" forms of art should be seen as exemplary in this regard (Rajan, "Encyclopedia," 341). Though there exist few affinities between Benjamin and Hegel's analyses of history, Benjamin's historical-philosophical penetration of literary forms is post-Hegelian. As I argue, the body of the *Trauerspiel,* with its elevation and analysis of allegory, exemplifies these debts most forcefully.

can be applied to the a-historical proclivities of philosophy more generally, as Benjamin's historical-critical philosophy of language provides a "ur-history of signifying intention" underwriting philosophical claims to a-historical totality (*OT*, 173). This should be seen as the negative or destructive moment of allegory, which emphasizes natural-historical decay and transience. However, allegory also contains a negative theological moment by which the signifying power of the human—or "creature" (Hansen, 103-7)—is upheld as a model of historical "language" after the fall, mirroring the reversal of Benjamin's "Theological-Political Fragment." It is upon such an antinomy, between redemption and transience, that Benjamin's theory of allegory is erected. In the following subsections (4.3.3.1-4), these "antinomies of the allegorical" will be critically examined in more depth (*OT,* 184).

### 4.3.3.1 Allegory v. Symbol

> "Whereas the symbol draws man into itself, the allegorical surges out of the ground of being to intercept the intention on its way down and therewith derail it." Benjamin, *OT,* 195.

Benjamin commences his discussion of allegory negatively, describing the Idealist aesthetic notion of the "symbol" as a "usurper" in the history of art (*OT,* 165). The symbol glorified the transcendent appearance of the absolute idea in the work of art, along with art's timeless unity, downplaying the contingencies of history. Benjamin saw the tradition of Idealist aesthetics as favoring the theological-classical ideology of symbolic unity—participated in in various ways by Schopenhauer, W.B. Yeats, Goethe, and G.F. Creuzer– whereas allegory was downgraded as a merely "cursory mode" of signification (*OT,* 169, 170-1). Against such conventions, Benjamin draws upon a counter tradition, informed by K. Giehlow, J. Görres, and Herder (*OT,* 175-6), which contends that allegory "is not a perfunctory illustrative technique but expression, as language is expression, as indeed writing is expression" (*OT,* 169, 135, 200).[242] The

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[242] Hansen notes that it was Creuzer and Görres who first introduced a temporal distinction into semiotics, distinguishing the natural "organic mountain and plant like quality" of the symbol, from the historical dimensions of allegory (50, 68). Benjamin also accords immense significance to Giehlow, whose analyses of Egyptian hieroglyphs as a "rebus" or "natural-theology of script" (*OT,* 177, 178) laid the groundwork for his own historical-philosophical "penetration of the allegorical form" (*OT,* 176). Throughout the *OT*, Benjamin associates allegory with the persistence of pagan, theosophical, and antiquated religious

Baroque allegorical emblem, with its montage of visual and linguistic signs, is read by Benjamin as a novel understanding of the relationship between history and signification (Buck-Morss, *Dialectics,* 159-200, 165, 161). Further, allegory's expressive understanding of media corresponds to Benjamin's early writings on language, along with his expressive understanding of the world, which he recasts within the broader Romantic fold.

Benjamin does not simply invert the historical primacy of symbol in favour of allegory; instead, he locates a temporal index differentiating the two: in allegory all meaning is subject to time, whereas the symbol upholds and captures the transcendent fleeting instant, the mystical *nunc stans* (*OT,* 138). Benjamin depicts "the core of the allegorical vision" (*OT,* 174) in contradistinction to the instantaneous symbol as follows:

> Whereas in the symbol, with the sublimation of downfall, the transfigured countenance of nature reveals itself fleetingly in the light of salvation, in allegory there lies before the eyes of the observer the *facies hippocratica* of history as petrified primordial landscape. History, in everything untimely, sorrowful, and miscarried that belongs to it from the beginning, is inscribed in a face—no, in death's head. (*OT,* 174)

Whereas the symbol attempts to capture the transient moment "in the light of salvation," allegory embraces transience, disrupting any stable relationship between elements of the linguistic sign. Caygill describes symbol and allegory's divergent relationship to temporality: "the symbol tries to make the finite participate in the infinite, to freeze the moment into an image of eternity, while allegory inscribes death into signification, making the relationship between appearance and essence one which is provisional and endangered" (58). Allegory is a form in which "all meanings are subject to time," whereby "all claims to eternity are qualified by their being made and unmade" (Caygill, 58): a conception of writing which formally figures themes of finitude and natural history, perpetually mourning the loss of transcendence. Describing this abyss opened by the allegorical mode of signification, Benjamin writes: "Whereas the symbol draws man into itself, the allegorical surges out of the ground of being to intercept the intention on its way down and therewith derail it" (*OT,* 195). In the "Prologue," Benjamin notes a

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symbolism within the Christian paradigm (see Buck-Morss, *Dialectics,* 172). For more on Benjamin's relationship to Herder, see Stern (12-19, 148-66).

similar "feeling of vertigo" evoked by the nihilism of the Baroque (*OT,* 39), one akin to the Adornian "shudder" or the "loss of ground" evoked by the authentic work of art (*AT,* 245, 220, 331).

This "abyss of allegory" provides insight into "natural history as [a] primal history of meaning or intention," that is, the fundamentally temporal index of all linguistic meaning and semiotic systems (*OT,* 173). Allegory is the "transcendental *loci*" which foregrounds the transient, or natural-historical, character of human signification (including the symbol) and should be seen as a metaphysical *a priori*, or "groundless ground" (*Ungrund*) atop which all philosophy is undertaken (Schelling, *FE,* 68-9). For the Baroque allegorists, history "is not the teleology of the enlightenment, for which human happiness was the supreme purpose of nature, but a wholly different teleology, that of the Baroque" (*OT,* 179). Such a teleology inclines towards the "mysterious instructions" of nature, and the "creatureliness" of the human (*OT,* 179; Hansen, 103-107, 119, 152-62). History and language follow nature in their embrace of impermanence, as Benjamin writes:

> Thus for the writers of this period... one can say, nature has remained the great teacher. Yet nature appears to them not in the bud and blossom but in the over ripeness and decay of its creations. Nature looms before them as eternal transience: in that alone did the saturnine gaze of those generations recognize history. (*OT,* 190-1)

Against the conventional Hegelian vision of history as the tribunal and gradual revelation of reason—in which the "bud disappears in the bursting forth of the blossom" (*PS,* 2)— Benjamin's offers a vision of nature that is supra-fecund, excessive, non-teleological, and ultimately transient. Such a historical optic, specifically in relation to such conceptions of Hegel, is elaborated in the penultimate section of Adorno's *Negative Dialectics,* "World Spirit and Natural History," which undertakes a corrective to the Hegelian historicism following the events of the twentieth-century (*ND*, 300-58; Pensky, 233; Hansen, 18).[243]

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[243] With such descriptions I do not mean to straw man Hegel as a simple logo-centric totalitarian; in fact, what Benjamin and Adorno demonstrate with their interventions is the possibility of reading the Hegelian program "against the grain." That involves reading Hegel as a thinker who favours the speculative accident over and against systematic closure—reading one moment of Hegel against himself—as domains such as nature and aesthetics gain an autonomy with respect to the encyclopedic whole. This will be explored in more depth in the final chapter of this project.

Benjamin's affinity with Adorno, the "modernist mandarin," can be pushed further to highlight that it is within Benjamin's Romantic meta-critique that the central epistemo-metaphysical leitmotif of Critical Theory is first elaborated: its aesthetic of ruination, or metaphysical doctrine of transience—natural history. Such an "ur-experience" of Modernity as a ruin is mirrored in the Baroque experience of history as a literal *Trauerspiel:* a stage in which all affirmative hopes are met with Baroque counter-revolution and the re-installation of the absolute authority of the status quo. Within such bleak contexts all that is permitted is the "revolutionary potential of the intriguer-schemer" (*OT,* 226, 77). As in Kafka's parables, the simple cunning gestures of the minor assistants wins out against the grand actions of the sovereign, who is continually lampooned and wrecked by his own intentions. By recognizing their work's as "ruins"—as unsuccessful and untimely and failed in advance—the Baroque playwrights entered into a "weak messianic" affinity with generations that would follow, holding open the possibility that such a "pile of wreckage" could be redeemed by post-historical critics (*SW 4:* 390, 392). In this way, the "ruin" becomes a meta-figure, or "cipher" to the historical-critical process, as Benjamin writes:

> When, with the *Trauerspiel*, history enters the scene, it does so as script. "History" stands written on nature's countenance in the sign-script of transience. The allegorical physiognomy of natural history, which is brought onstage in the *Trauerspiel*, is actually present as ruin. In the ruin, history has passed perceptibly into the setting. And so configured, history finds expression not as process of an eternal life but as process of incessant decline. Allegory thereby positions itself beyond beauty. Allegories are in the realm of thought what ruins are in the realm of things. (*OT,* 188)

The allegorist strives to be at home in this unsuccessful and failed landscape, "the pile of rubble" (*OT,* 189) that is the ephemerality of historical happening, while continually holding open the possibility of criticism and "rescue" by generations which will follow (*OT,* 194). Benjamin describes "the baroque ideal of knowledge" as a "storeroom," or a "stockpiling, to which the giant libraries were a monument is fulfilled in image writing," thus highlighting the intimate relation between language, ruin, and history subtending the allegorical vision of the Baroque (*OT,* 196, 201). Benjamin shares such a melancholic vision, one in which "meaning and death are brought to fruition in historical unfolding. Just as they are closely intermeshed as seeds in the unredeemed state of sin in the

creature" (*OT,* 174). Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* book strives after such Baroque ideals of knowledge, ruining itself in the performative articulation of allegory and natural history.

### 4.3.3.2 Benjamin's Mortuary Romanticism

"[T]he history of works prepares for their critique, and thus historical distance increases their power. If, to use a simile, one views the growing work as a burning funeral pyre, then the commentator stands before it like a chemist, the critic like an alchemist. Whereas, for the former [the chemist], wood and ash remain the sole objects of his analysis, for the latter only the flame itself preserves an enigma that of what is alive. Thus, the critic inquiries into the truth, whose living flame continues to burn over the heavy logs of what is passed and the light ashes of what has been experienced." Benjamin, "Goethe's *Elective Affinities*" *SW 1:* 298.

Allegory should be seen as the central element of Benjamin's own mortuary vision of Romanticism. McCole positions Benjamin's notion of allegory in relation to his "long term intellectual strategy" of an "immanent critique of Romanticism," specifically its affirmative religious and transcendent Idealist moments, and in such a manner, allegory should be considered a "corrective to the affirmative temptations of Romanticism" (115, 140, cf.124-130).[244] At several junctures in the *OT*, Benjamin blames the *Frühromantik* affirmation of symbol and its transcendent motifs for the lowly status accorded to the *Trauerspiel* and its doctrine of allegory (*OT,* 165-7, 170-5).

The Early Romantics sought to "perfect" or "absolutize" individual works in an affirmative sense, whereas Benjamin's own mortuary Romanticism participates in the work's destruction and decay, examining the "natural history" of texts as they progress through time. As Benjamin writes, "Whereas Romanticism, in the name of infinity, form, and idea, critically potentiates the perfected construct, the deep gaze of allegory at one stroke transforms works and things into moving script" (*OT,* 186). Against the unified totality of the symbol, "the field of allegorical intuition" affirms "fragment, ruin," and the "lack of freedom" of the "beautiful *physis*" (*OT,* 186). As the enlightenment saw history

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[244] McCole sees a criticism of the affirmative tendencies in the *Frühromantiker* as intimately entwined with Benjamin's understanding of allegory, which attempts to redeem a negative notion of Romantic critique: "There was a hidden constellation, between the true intentions of Baroque allegory, the missed chance of the *Frühromantik,* and the slender hopes remaining for an uncorrupted Idealist in [Benjamin's] own times" (154). For McCole, such a negative vision of Romanticism provided the groundwork for Benjamin's own modernist avant-garde aesthetic, "Many of the figures of the allegorical aesthetic would later recur in Benjamin's encounters with modernist and avant-garde culture. In a sense, the *Trauerspiel* study employs an implicitly modernist aesthetic" (McCole, 139). In this manner, allegory should be seen as fundamental to Benjamin's own mortuary vision of Romanticism. I push against McCole's assertions that Benjamin departs from Romanticism, positioning Benjamin instead as a mortuary Romantic philosopher.

as the working out and perfection of freedom, Benjamin allied history with nature, creating a natural-historical vision shot through with inevitable decay, ephemerality, and transience. Parsing such a divergence in terms of symbol and allegory, McCole will write, "the symbol provides a fleeting glimpse of totality, whereas the allegorical gaze reveals history and nature as a devastated landscape subject to irresistible decay" (138).

In this manner, Benjamin moves away from the affirmative tendencies latent in his own early conception of criticism—as typified in his dissertation, wherein the critic "completes" the work—towards a darker mortuary or negative Romanticism in which the critic participates in the destruction and decay of works. Describing this destructive mode of critique, Benjamin will write:

> Criticism is the mortification of works. The essence of these works is more receptive to this than is any other production. Mortification of works: not therefore—as the romantics have it—the awakening of consciousness in living works, but the unsettlement of knowledge in those that have died away. (*OT*, 193)

The works of the Baroque playwrights "make no attempt to disguise the fact that they contain the seeds of their own destruction" (McCole, 152; Hansen, 71). As in Beckett's *Endgame,* theatrical tropes stop functioning and breakdown; likewise, in the *Trauerspiel,* the texts seem to willingly pile themselves atop the ruin of history. In his essay on *Elective Affinities*, Benjamin asserts that at the work's "origin," "material and truth content" are closely entwined, whereas throughout a work's natural-historical decay, such a linkage is severed, allowing the work to enter into new constellations of truth content (*SW 1:* 297; cf. Adorno, *AT,* 195). In such a manner, criticism expresses an allegiance with the work's decay: with its natural history. Alluding to this destructive moment of criticism, McCole will write, "The task of critique is not to preserve the work the way it really was, but to participate with the corrosive moments of time" (152).[245] It should be emphasized that Benjamin's employment of allegory is not a total abandonment of his early *Frühromantik* proclivities, nor is Benjamin wholly dismissive of Idealism. Instead, allegory seeks to mediate moments of Benjamin's early philosophy of language and

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[245] Likewise, Hansen continually stresses the "iconoclastic" moment of Benjamin's concept of criticism, in which the critic smashes the "beautiful semblance (*schoner Schein*)" of the work's façade, in order to get at the work's allegorical or historical core (66-7). Adorno likewise describes truth content in terms of such an iconoclasm (see *AT,* 195).

criticism within a broader mortuary Romantic fold, as will be shown in the following section.[246]

### 4.3.3.3 Language after the Fall: Allegory and the Idea

"What is specific to writing is that with every sentence it stops and starts anew." Benjamin, *OT,* 4.

This section will analyze the relationship between allegory and Benjamin's theory of language, along with the theory of ideas elaborated in his "Epistemo-Critical Prologue." Allegory provides Benjamin with a historically informed model of signification after the linguistic "fall," one in tune with his metaphysical doctrine of transience. Such a model can be staged by way of Benjamin's analysis of the Baroque "sovereign" and his duplicitous double "the intriguer." As the dialectical inversion of the sovereign (associated with the symbol), the intriguer harnesses the power of allegory: "instead of claiming the power to control signification, the character represents the destruction of signification" (Caygill, 59). Describing the intriguer's unique relationship to language, Benjamin will write:

> The reversal from the purely phonetic element of creaturely language to the pregnant irony that echoes from the mouth of the intriguer is highly indicative of this character's relation to language. The intriguer is the master of meanings: in the harmless outpouring of an onomatopoetic natural language, these meanings are the blockage and origin of a mourning for which the intriguer is, with the meanings, responsible. (*OT,* 226)

The uniqueness of allegory is its immersion in the profane and expressive language of things, in the mimetic world of everyday objects, which it both defames and redeems. Allegory inscribes transience and natural history at the heart of language, and for the allegorist, at the heart of thinking as such. The "minority" relation of the intriguer— mirrored in Benjamin's 1934 discussion of Kafka's creaturely "assistants" (*SW 2:* 798, 809, 815-6)—relates to its broader "minoritarian" relationship to language (Deleuze & Guattari, *Kafka,* 16-19). For Benjamin, such an immanent immersion in creaturely

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[246] Buck-Morss locates allegory as a moment in Benjamin's larger immanent meta-critique of Idealism, participating in his movement of thought towards materialism and the avant-garde (*Dialectics,* 175). Though Benjamin's gravitation towards materialism has been well documented in the literature, it should be emphasized that despite such interventions, Benjamin remained within the Idealist-Romantic sphere of concerns.

language represents a negative theological chance for "profane illumination": a new historically informed metaphysical-critical understanding of philosophy.

Throughout his discussion of allegory, Benjamin alludes to a return of mimetic or onomatopoetic "ur-signification" in the language of the Baroque, rehashing motifs from his earlier work on language and mimesis (*OT,* 221). Allegory presents the possibility for a "new universal language," after Babel, a mode of "primal sound or hearing," which occurs when language returns to "primal natural speech," as sound, elemental "fire writing," music, and mimesis (*OT,* 221, 227, 230, 232, 13). Within such a profane and allegorical "philosophy of the creature," "everything has a mouth for the purposes of revelation," and philosophy enters into a new rapport with the transient language of things (*OT,* 218-222). After the fall into the prattle of the "judging word" of the concept, allegory represents a poetic opportunity to recover a semblance of "language as such" from within the "language of man" (*OT,* 256, 226, 232; Hansen, 90; Weber, 9).

Benjamin emphasizes allegory's "extreme recourse to [the] language of the concrete": its outlandish constructions, interruptions, "sudden reversals" in which "thoughts evaporate into images" (*OT,* 213-4, 215). Baroque language is marred by crisis and a continual "rebellion among its elements" (*OT,* 224). This outlandish quality exposes itself as a deliberate construction—as always already a "ruin"—announcing the transience of history against the timeless "symbol." Benjamin describes Baroque "literature as the *ars inveniendi* [art of invention]" (*OT,* 189): it is a deliberate and unsubtle showcase of emblems, construction, staging, and ostentation. Benjamin positions *Trauerspiel* in an affinity with Brecht's "estrangement effect" *avant la lettre*, whereby the work continually betrays its own constructed status through interruptions and meta-theatrical gestures (Caygill, 60).[247] Such an eccentric and tensioned

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[247] Describing the tensioned mosaic that is Baroque linguistic construction, Benjamin will write, "In the anagrams, the onomatopoetic locutions, and many other sorts of linguistic devices, word, syllable, and sound proudly flaunt themselves—emancipated from every traditional nexus of meaning—as a thing that can be exploited allegorically. The language of the Baroque is constantly convulsed by rebellions among its elements" (*OT,* 224). Benjamin continually emphasizes such linguistic tension as characteristic of the Baroque: "Script and sound stand opposed to each other in high tensioned polarity" and further, "The tension between word and script is immeasurable in the Baroque" (*OT,* 218). In his correspondence, Benjamin repeatedly underscores the linguistic moment of his *Trauerspiel* study, as he describes the "germ of the project" to H. Hofmannsthal as the "explanation of picture, text, and music." (*BC,* 309). Buck-Morss has further stressed the constellation of allegory with other aesthetic avant-gardes analyzed by Benjamin,

understanding of language is mirrored in the "unmitigated chutzpah" that is the *Trauerspiel's* prologue, which, through its unashamed Platonic Idealism and intentionally baffling constructions, forces the reader to pause "at stations of reflection," confronting "the question of presentation" and considering the linguistic nature of truth (*BC,* 261; *OT,* 4, 1-2).

The language of Baroque allegory makes no attempt to hide its "un-natural" or fabricated quality, and in so doing emphasizes the first sense of natural history discussed in the prologue: the "natural life" of words and texts (*OT,* 24-26). Into the "emptied out physis of Christianity," the allegorist enters, awakening the "charnel house of long dead interiors" through the construction of Ideas (*OT,* 247; Lukács, *Novel,* 64). Adorno first grasped the intimate relationship between the doctrine of ideas in Benjamin's "Epistemo-Critical Prologue" and his understanding of allegory, which for Adorno, represented "an essentially different logical form than that of a scheme of thought...constituted by a general conceptual structure" (*NH,* 263). That is, allegory offered the "alternative logical structure" of "the constellation," in which concepts are arranged in a mosaic of tension (Adorno, *NH,* 263; Benjamin, *OT,* 10-11; Buck-Morss, *Dialectics*, 230). Benjamin's idea-constellations are immanent configurations of the "language of things," which are "saved" upon entrance into the "genuine unity of truth" (*OT,* 9). Benjamin's allegorical theory of the idea, along with his mortuary understanding of criticism, provides a linguistically informed model for the practice of thought after the linguistic fall into the prattle of signification.

### 4.3.3.4 Allegory as Semblance: Redemption
"[T]he more that nature and antiquity were felt to be guilt-laden, the more obligatory became their allegorical interpretation, understood as their only conceivable salvation. For in the midst of that knowing degradation of the object, the melancholic intention keeps faith, altogether incomparably, with its being as a thing." Benjamin, *OT,* 245.

Perhaps the most ambiguous moment in Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* study is the "reversal" [*Umschwung*] that occurs at the text's conclusion (*OT,* 235-57; *GS I:* 405-6). In such a moment, allegory itself is revealed as transient— as a form of "semblance"

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most notably, the filmographic practices of montage, along with the poetic *correspondences* of Baudelaire (*Dialectics,* 174-7, 182, 201).

[*Schein*]—and melancholy reverses into its opposite, "ecstasy." As Benjamin emphasizes, despite its seemingly nihilistic proclivities, Baroque allegory maintained a certain Christian eschatological vision through which objects could be "redeemed": "indeed, the insight into the transience of things, and the concern to save them and render them eternal, is one of the strongest motives of the allegorical" (*OT,* 243). And further, "allegory is most abidingly where transience and eternity most nearly collide" (*OT,* 243). Thus, despite their insight into the groundless ground of transience, the allegorists remained bound by a fundamentally Lutheran horizon, whereby, "Allegories fulfill[ed] and revoke[d] the nothingness in which they present themselves" (*OT,* 255).

The Baroque allegorists felt ensnared by the "guilt laden physis of Christianity" (*OT,* 247), and through refashioned religious allegories sought refuge from transience in the weak illuminations provided by the persistence of the ancient Greek pantheon, and cultic pagan religious practices (*OT,* 239; Buck-Morss, *Dialectics,* 172-4). Benjamin notes the common Baroque alliance of the figure of Satan with all that is earthly, natural, naked: "an empty abyss of evil" which provokes "the vertigo of its bottomless depths" (*OT,* 251-2). Yet the "bottomless profundity" of nature is cut short by a Christian eschatology of redemption, which brings about a Hölderlinian "turnabout into holy salvation" (*OT,* 252; Buck-Morss, *Dialectics,* 231, 235).[248] Baroque allegory ultimately betrays the transient natural-historical realm it awakened. Commenting upon the crowning allegory of "Golgotha" [*Schädelstätte*] Benjamin demonstrates how the ultimate symbol of death and transience is cut through by an equally present power of salvation. Negating its own negation, allegory itself becomes a "meta-figure," or allegory, of itself: "In [Golgotha], transience is not so much signified, allegorically presented, as—itself signifying—presented as allegory. As the allegory of resurrection" (*OT,* 254; *GS 1:* 405; Hansen, 101). Ultimately the Baroque allegorist betrays the transience of nature in favour of a Lutheran solace: "The allegorist awakens in God's world," allowing nature and objects to be "held fast in high heaven" (*OT,* 254, 257).

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[248] Hölderlinian motifs are evident throughout Benjamin's *Trauerspiel*, and elsewhere in the conclusion, Benjamin refers to the "sober-matter of fact" nature of the Baroque ruin (*OT,* 257). More remains to be said regarding the importance of Hölderlin in Benjamin's Romantic-Idealism.

Benjamin critically moves against such a Christian theological model of redemption, into a secular, or profane, model of theology, which glorifies material-historical models of redemption. For Benjamin, authentic allegory will ultimately "go away empty handed," forced to be content with its melancholy temperament of mourning, the Goethean "mother of allegories and their content" (*OT,* 255, 251). Allegory can, at best, only approximate and immerse itself in the secret hieroglyphic language of nature. For Benjamin, allegory must maintain this "hopeless fidelity to the creaturely" against the philosophical subject and the transcendent possibilities of redemption: "[the allegorists] infidelity toward human beings corresponds to a fidelity toward these objects, one completely absorbed in contemplative devotion" (*OT,* 161). Benjamin continues, "all the wisdom of the melancholic hearkens to the deep; it is won from immersion in the life of creaturely things, and nothing of the voice of revelation reaches it," the melancholic embraces such "promptings of mother earth drawn from the night of brooding like treasures glimmering from their terrestrial hold" (*OT,* 157). It should be stressed that such an affirmation of transience nonetheless remains within the Romantic-Idealist fold, mirroring the self–destructive tendencies of the "late" English Romantics, and perhaps more so, the traumatic a strife ridden middle work of Schelling which will be discussed in the following chapter (5.3.2-5.3.3).

Hegel's *Phenomenology* ends with a similar image of "Golgotha" [*Schädelstätte*] to describe the (supposedly triumphant) arrival of his philosophy at "absolute knowing" (*PS,* 492-3; *PG,* 591). This moment of absolute knowledge is often seen as the symbolic triumph of reason over the totality of the real: the exultant completion of *Spirit's* circle of development. However, viewed allegorically, one can locate a similar reversal in Hegel's scene of absolute knowledge. As a ruin, or "Golgotha," it does not culminate in some symbolic transcendence, but rather, absolute knowing is shot through with the historical contingencies of allegory, such that Hegel can likewise be seen as a thinker of transience. Hegel figures absolute knowledge in a manner that affirms continual progression, describing the culmination of *Spirit's* journey in terms of a "movement...that returns into itself, the circle that presupposes its beginning and reaches it only at the end" (*PS,* 488); such that "absolute knowing" is not a final destination, but a "slow moving succession of Spirits, a gallery of images" (*PS,* 492). If at the conclusion of the *Phenomenology,* Hegel

seems on the edge of transience (as opposed to final absolute synthesis), in his *Aesthetics*, he "ends" art's dialectic with the confused sphere of Romantic art, as if to affirm the perpetual movement of aesthetics, such that no synthesis or movement upward to conceptual philosophy is seemingly possible (Rajan, "Writing," 126, 122-3). This possibility of reading Hegel as a ruined thinker of transience will be explored in more depth in my final chapter (6.0) dealing with Hegel.

In the literature, it is common to mediate Benjamin's melancholy within some broader narrative of redemption: for Hansen, Benjamin is ultimately a theological-existentialist (in a manner akin to Kierkegaard), one who advocates an "ethico-theological freedom unto death" (95). For Buck-Morss, Benjamin's pessimism lays the groundwork for the political promise of Marxism (*Dialectics,* 175, 240-1). However, Buck-Morss holds open the possibility of another form of resolution that will do justice to both nature and history, and she reads *The Arcades Project* as a Kabalistic-Marxist program in which "second nature" is "named" (*Dialectics,* 229, 240; cf. *AP,* 21-26). Ultimately, Benjamin is a thinker who remains within the ambiguity and profundity of natural history: within the contagion of nature rather than the stasis of the architectonic. In this way, Benjamin's critical-metaphysical philosophy is one which affirms transience as an ur-principle with which all thought must reckon.

# Part 3: German Idealism

"Science sets forth this formative process in all its detail and necessity, exposing the mature configuration of everything which has already been reduced to a moment and property of Spirit. The goal is Spirit's insight into what knowing is. Impatience demands the impossible, to wit, the attainment of the end without the means. But the *length* of this path has to be endured, because for one thing, each moment is necessary; and further, each moment has to be *lingered* over because each is itself as complete individual shape, and one is only viewed in absolute perspective when its determinateness is regarded as a concrete whole, or the whole is regarded as uniquely qualified by that determination." Hegel, *PS,* 17.

The final part of this project takes up the work of Schelling and Hegel respectively. The prior exegeses of Adorno and Benjamin has laid the groundwork to consider German Idealism after Critical Theory, that is, in light of the post-Idealist philosophical critical methods of Benjamin and Adorno. In this section I further contend that the writings of Hegel and Schelling are always already self-fracturing, providing ample mechanisms, or "accidents," through which they can be read against themselves. I present Schelling as one who attempts to theorize "with nature"; that is, one who attempts to allows the autogenetic crises of nature to arise philosophically (Ch. 5). This attempt to philosophize with nature has dire consequences for any possible system of philosophy, and I read Schelling's middle writings as space in which phantasmatic negativity continually threatens philosophy's providential closure. In my final chapter (6.0), I consider Hegel's (purportedly) absolute corpus as a "ruin," which is able to be speculatively invaded and refashioned in speculative directions. I elevate Hegel's aesthetics and philosophy of nature as prisms through which to reflect upon his encyclopedic system, allowing Hegel to be critically read beyond himself.

# 5 *Philosophy with Nature: Schelling and the "Original Diremption in Nature itself"*

> "It is futile to attempt to explain the diversity of nature by the peaceful eisemplasy of various forces. Everything that becomes can only become in discontent. And just as anxiety is the fundamental sensation of every living creature, so, too everything that lives is only conceived and born in violent struggle. Who could believe that nature could create so many different, wonderful products...in peace and quiet?"
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> Schelling, *AW,* 90-1.

## 5.1 Introductory remarks: Philosophy with Nature

> "There is no more nature." Beckett, *Endgame,* 11.

The work of Schelling has long been considered anathema, both in the history of philosophy, and in commentary on German Idealism—in which Schelling is regarded as a mere mystical precursor in the unfolding of Hegel's project. Today, Schelling is emerging from the "long dark shadow of Hegel" (Snow, 1). The ubiquity of issues of nature, climate, and ecology, along with the scholarly interventions of a recent array of speculative and deconstructive thinkers (such as Wirth, Rajan, Žižek) has led to an (un)timely re-evaluation of Schelling's natality as a theorist. Schelling provides the resources to think an expanded conception of philosophy, one which does justice to—or risks itself in relation to—the autogenetic dynamism of the natural world. In the following chapter I will explore the main contours of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*: a model of philosophizing with the natural world, allowing the contradictory dynamics of "life" to arise philosophically, in contradistinction to conventional enlightenment philosophies of nature as typified by Kant. Following this discussion of *Naturphilosophie,* the consequences of nature for a broader philosophical system will also be explored via a reading of Schelling's "middle work" (1809-1821). Schelling's thinking develops a constitutive, negative dialectical, "tension between system and life" (Snow, 3), allowing pathological negativity a dangerous degree of autonomy within the philosophical system.

To philosophize about nature with Schelling means leaving space for the vexing and problematic status of nature as an "original diremption": an "*Ungrund,*" or "indivisible remainder" that can never be fully incorporated into thought (*FO,* 205; *FE,*

29).[249] Schelling advocates that one practice "ecology *with* nature": any possible system of thought must be exposed to the unconscious "abyss of the past" in nature (*AW,* 31).[250] In a similar manner, Adorno employs psychoanalysis to lead philosophy back to its constitutive "natural history," the transient metaphysic subtending all thought (*NH,* 263-4). For Schelling, nature cannot be thought as a mere moment in philosophy's final (conceptual) triumph; instead, it must be seen as a dynamic and troubling space with which philosophy must continually tarry. As such, Schelling allows one to theorize the disaster of nature in a way that does not subsume its tangled "rustle" to the "stillness of the thought" (Hegel, *PN,* 7). Likewise, *Naturphilosophie* does not fetishize nature in itself as some deep ecological substratum independent of its actualization in the human subject. Schelling allows thought to be more "realistic" or "naturalistic" with respect to questions of ecology: dispensing with harmonious, vengeful, or anthropocentric notions of nature. Instead, Schelling beckons nature to arise philosophically, experimentally opening philosophy to the dynamics of nature and "life."[251] For Schelling, nature remains a disruptive moment which continually contests the stability of thought.

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[249] Throughout this chapter I take "nature" to be a constellation of divergent, often contradictory, processes defined in dialectical opposition to history (following Adorno, *NH,* 253, 263). This is not to say that "nature in itself" does not exist, but rather, such natural processes are always already socially encoded by human practices and thus expressed within the human normative space of reason. Yet, following Adorno and Schelling, one must posit a negative dialectical relationship between nature and history, neither can be fully resolved (in the sense of *Aufhebung)* in the other, instead one must recognize the inherent "non-identity," or perpetual conflict, between nature and history. In this way, "nature," remains a regulative "non-identical" notion, a "dark ground of spirit" (McGrath) or "indivisible remainder" (Žižek), which can never fully be recuperated in thought. As such, "nature" names the perpetual other of spirit, an originary site of diremption which continually undermines the stability of thought.

[250] By this I mean to refashion the title of Timothy Morton's *Ecology Without Nature* (2009), which argues that "the idea of nature is getting in the way of properly ecological forms of culture, philosophy, politics and art" (1, 14). Morton aptly criticizes the fetishization of natural "ambiance" and "eco-mimesis" (124), within ecological discourse, chastising such discourses as being excessively "Romantic," while neglecting the complex mediations between nature and history. Morton himself argues that one should dispense wholly with authentic "nature," instead advocating for a "melancholic" environmental aesthetic, or "dark ecology," heavily informed by the work of Adorno (202, 184-6). Morton is correct in his eco-critical analysis of the tropes of ecological writing, though his characterization of Romanticism is simplistic, ignoring the ecological potentials within darker romantic thinkers such as Hegel and Schelling. Thus, I contend that Morton's wholesale rejection of "nature" is premature. I wish to refashion Morton's term to harness its critical-heuristic value, while seeing German Idealist conceptions of "nature," as still containing immense contemporary efficacy.

[251] Wirth has demonstrated the immense efficacy of Schelling for discourses of extinction (or "the ruin of nature") and climate catastrophe. See "Extinction" in *Schelling's Practice of the Wild* (3-29). Much more remains to be said about the ecological valences of Schelling's thinking, with specific regard to his imperative to philosophize with nature, or to allow natural processes to arise philosophically.

Schelling chastises previous systems of thought—characterized by the Idealism of Leibniz, and the monist-materialism of Spinoza (*FE,* 59-62)—for their lack of a "living ground" (*FE,* 26); that is, for treating nature as something external to *Spirit* and failing to recognize the reciprocal entanglement of both domains. Both merely "real" or "ideal" starting points for philosophy are unable to grasp the "original identity" of the "organic whole" subtending both nature and *Spirit* (*US,* 9-13, 27, 36; Matthews, xiii, 9). Following Hegel, philosophy must understand "substance and subject" as entwined moments, or differing potencies, participating in the same absolute (*PS,* 10-12).[252] Yet this should not be seen as some "correlationism" in which philosophy anthropomorphically projects itself into nature (Meillassoux, 5), but rather, a troubling dialogue in which philosophy is led to consider its unconscious pathologies via the autogenesis of nature. Schelling does not present an "autopoietic" system in which some stable immunitary equilibrium is maintained, but rather, an "autogenetic" system, in which speculative offshoots and disasters, continually upset the stability of thought. Jason Wirth has aptly glossed Schelling's thought as a "practice of the wild," which stages "an asymmetrical dialogue...like attempting to communicate with nature...[or] Job's dialogues with the whirlwind" in which philosophy is incessantly fractured by discoursing with its own alterity, exposing its concepts to the "living ground" of nature (*Conspiracy,* 159; *Wild,* xii). Schelling's corpus challenges one to "Think and dwell on the sovereign autogenesis of nature" (With, *Wild*, 23). In these two chapters on Schelling and Hegel, a model of philosophy with nature will be forwarded, in which thought immanently collaborates and critically reflects upon itself by way of the natural world. The crowning achievements of Idealism—notions such as freedom, dialectic and system—are forced to reckon with the disruptive fecundity and "sublime squandering" (Wirth, *Wild,* 13) of the natural world.

Schelling's work should be seen as staging a confrontation, without definitive resolution, between philosophy and nature, opening a productive space in which philosophy is troubled and (re)theorized in dynamic directions. This space of meta-critique—in which reason is led to immanently confront and reflect upon itself—is

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[252] For more on the "speculative identity thesis" in Schelling (and in relation to Kant and Hegel), see Ng (67-80).

central to the work of Benjamin and Adorno, along with the absolute Idealism of Hegel and Schelling.[253] Thought in constellation, these thinkers provide a polyphony of models through which to theorize the actuality of philosophy anew, encompassing a vast array of disciplines, domains, and experiences. These gestures of immanent critique (of reason by itself) invite consideration of those moments in the Idealist tradition in which the autogenetic dynamism— "the accident" (Hegel, *PS,* 18)—or the inherent genesis of thought troubles the Idealist desire to construct overarching systems of all *"the philosophical sciences"* (Hegel, *EO*, 51-3). In such a manner, German Idealism should be read as performing an auto-deconstruction, or short circuiting, of thought by itself, considering philosophy within alternate disciplinary constellations, along with in differing relations with the natural world.

Presented in constellation with Benjamin and Adorno, the deconstructive ramifications of Hegel and Schelling's absolute Idealism further jut to the fore. In relation to questions of nature, the *Naturphilosophie* of Schelling (and Hegel) provides a lively space through which to revitalize the thought of nature beyond the static antinomies of contemporary ecological thought, allowing nature to be considered a dynamic *Ungrund* to new potential philosophies of *Spirit*. Unique to the absolute Idealism of Schelling and Hegel is a commitment to philosophize with nature: to incorporate and tarry with its mishaps and incongruities. Though nature is often addressed in the tradition of philosophy, its tangled autogenesis is sacrificed in the realization of larger philosophical aims: such as the unity of the philosophical architectonic, or ethics (for Kant), or the "absolute" realization of the encyclopedic system (for Hegel).[254]

I take *"Naturphilosophie"* to provide a "naturalistic yet non-mechanistic foundation" for philosophy, in which philosophy does not apply external concepts to the

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[253] As I have asserted throughout, I critically employ the term "absolute Idealism" to broadly gloss the thinking of Hegel and Schelling. Following Beiser (*Subjectivism,* 355-74), absolute Idealism should be distinguished from the critical Idealism of Kant and Fichte in its movement of reason beyond the concepts and categories of the epistemic subject, considering reason as manifesting in nature, history, politics, art, along with the structure of thought.

[254] As will be demonstrated in the next chapter on Hegel, though he attempts to subsume nature philosophically, *Naturphilosophie* remains a troubling "indivisible remainder" that he is unable to smoothly incorporate into his finished encyclopedia. Via Adorno, I will experimentally unbind Hegel's subsumption of nature, employing nature as a critical lens through which to reflect on the Hegelian program.

world, but immanently collaborates with nature, such that nature is allowed to arise theoretically (Beiser, *Idealism,* 508; Grant, 2-3). *Naturphilosophie* is a mode of thought which does not oppose nature to *Spirit* but understands both subject and object as mutually implicated in each other. Schelling's approach to philosophizing about nature moves against the "fallacy of constitutive subjectivity" (Adorno, *ND,* xx). That is, *Naturphilosophie* endeavors to think nature beyond the Kantian Copernican turn: unconditioned by the boundaries of the subjective Idealist epistemic subject, recognizing the "primacy of the object," or beginning with dynamics other than those of the subject (Adorno, *ND,* 183-88). However, such thought models do not fetishize some immediate "sense-certainty," or authentic (state of) nature independent of conceptual determination. For Hegel and Schelling, nature comes to thought already mediated by way of the physical and life sciences: the task is not to recover some lost immediacy with "Being," but rather, to open a productive and (inter) disciplinary dialogue between nature and *Spirit*. Adorno and Benjamin's notion of "natural history" allows nature and *Sprit* to be dialectically reflected upon by way of each other, producing a continual troubling of one term by way of the other. Further, natural history also demonstrates the possibility of another kind of history, another model of thinking German Idealism that does not culminate in some stable transition from nature to *Spirit*, but rather, presents an immense speculative laboratory through which to think alternative natural historical configurations.

What is promised in the *Naturphilosophie* of Schelling, a promise mirrored in the work of Adorno and Benjamin, is the potential for a more inclusive project of reason: one in which nature is not subordinated to a narrow philosophical agenda, but rather, is "quickened with freedom," compelled to arise philosophically and allowed a constitutive philosophical role (*FO,* 14). Such a "quickening with freedom" occurs on the level of form, and following Matthews, Schelling's work attempts to import an "organic and developmental model of philosophy," from the "system of self-organizing nature that is our world" (xii). The experimental dynamism of Schelling's texts—their essayistic, ephemeral, and provisional character—mirrors the autogenetic and pathological productivity of the natural world. Likewise, Adorno's work attempts to incorporate "nature's wound" *(AT,* 68-75), that is, to allegorically figure the suffering ephemerality of the natural world in the very form of philosophy (as I have argued in 1.3). Benjamin and

Adorno confront a conceptual philosophy of the concept with an originary history of transience (or natural history), shattering philosophy's absolute symbolic pretensions via the primacy of change, decay, and ruin, alongside other non-discursive (or "non-identical") logics.

The relationship between the Frankfurt School and Schelling has yet to be considered in depth. Though explicit reference to Schelling in Adorno and Benjamin's corpus is scant (see 1.3 & 4.2.2), several proximate figures, notably Bloch, Habermas, and Rosenzweig engaged extensively with Schelling's work, such that the anxiety of Schelling's influence is likely.[255] However, as this project is not an influence study, what is more important is the thematic affinity between Schelling, Benjamin, and Adorno centering on a shared commitment to a natural-historical philosophy of transience.

In other words, Schelling can be seen in a feedback loop of reciprocal critical illumination with the Frankfurt School (Benjamin and Adorno), demonstrating the possibility of reading German Idealism—along with its notions of *Spirit*—beyond its historical epoch, while further illuminating the presence of Idealist motifs within Adorno and Benjamin's work. This chapter provides a critical exegesis of Schelling's work animated by the post-historical constellation of the Frankfurt School, primarily Adorno, though Benjamin and Habermas as well, along with supplementary reference to Bataille.[256] These theorists allow Schelling to be seen as deconstructing static enlightenment notions of nature, while allowing a robust conception of nature to be forwarded *within* a philosophical framework that is potentially amenable to critical social theory.

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[255] Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption,* employs many prominent Schellingian (and Idealist) motifs, see 3-6, 10-18, 41-53. Habermas' first dissertation, "Dialectical Idealism in Transition to Materialism" (written under Adorno's supervision), examines Schelling's *Weltalter Project,* both immanently, in relation to the tradition of Idealism (specifically in relation to Hegel, 48-53, 61, 81)*,* and speculatively in relation to Jewish mysticism (53-5), and historical materialism (64-85). These lines of thinking are continued in Habermas' "Ernst Bloch—A Marxist Schelling" (see 61-76), and further highlighted by Rajan ("Natural History," 194-5). More remains to be said regarding the relationship of Bloch to Schelling, following Habermas' lead. Given that Bloch serves as a dialectical interlocutor for much of Benjamin and Adorno's work, further speculative constellations can be drawn between these thinkers.
[256] Particularly in these chapters on Schelling and Hegel, Bataille's work will be employed to highlight the negative and transgressive elements of their absolute Idealist projects. Habermas' (Adornian) work on Schelling ("Dialectical Idealism…") will also be referenced throughout this chapter, and remains an under theorized site in the tradition of Critical Theory.

This speculative constellation allows several issues to be raised. In a primary sense, Schelling's thought prefigures several facets of what Adorno would later term the negative dialectic: a mode of dialectical thought which favors negativity, or non-synthesis against the unity of the philosophical system (see 1.4 & 2.2). Particularly in Schelling's middle work, namely the *Freedom Essay* (1809) and *Ages of the World* (1815), under the influence of Hegel, nature and freedom become entangled in a rotary dialectic in which each pole continually un-works the other. This middle work can be opposed to Schelling's earlier *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800)*,* in which nature unfolds progressively towards freedom in Fichtean fashion (*STI,* 1-4, 199). This and other early texts such as the *Treatise Explicatory of the Idealism in the Science of Knowledge* (1797), typify a certain enlightenment optimism that would see the progressive unfolding of *Spirit* out of nature, providentially grounding a world of freedom upon the series of self-organizing stages that is nature (*STI,* 202) —a paradigm that Schelling still holds on to as a hope in the *Freedom* essay (*FO,* 53).[257] Seen in constellation with Schelling and Hegel, Adorno's thought should be read as an Idealist philosophy of *Spirit* transposed into the twentieth-century. Adorno's negative dialectic attempts to articulate a speculative model of experience that avoids the pitfalls of epistemological subjectivism (the Kantian "the fallacy of constitutive subjectivity" [*ND,* xx]) and Hegelian conceptualism (or "identity thinking," [*ND,* 1-11]). Schelling's thought provides a plethora of "theoretical" models through which to think such alternative narratives of Idealism, fracturing its absolute pretentions by way of alterity and negativity (Rajan, "Margins," 325-334).

For Derrida (in *Of Spirit,* 1987), "*Geist*" remains marred by a problematic residue of logo-centrism and the baggage of metaphysics, thus twentieth-century thinkers such as Heidegger did their best to avoid beginning philosophy in such a problematic "Idealist" manner (1-6, 29).[258] However, Benjamin and Adorno (along with Lukács, Simmel, and

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[257] Describing his early providential narrative of human spirit, Schelling will write: "That the concept of history embodies the notion of an infinite tendency to progress has been sufficiently shown...For those who deny it could equally well maintain that man is no more possessed of a history than the animal, being confined...to an eternal circuit of actions, like Ixion upon his wheel" (*STI,* 202).

[258] Derrida's *Of Spirit* argues that Heidegger, despite his attempt to begin philosophy anew as "fundamental ontology," remains marred by a discourse of "*Spirit*" (5-9, 14-22). Adorno levels similar critiques of Heidegger throughout *ND* (61-133) and *The Jargon of Authenticity* (xix-xxii, 3-9), though contra Derrida,

Bloch) embrace a post-historical conception of Idealism within the academic context of neo-Kantianism, extending Idealism, and its problematics, into the twentieth-century (Rajan, "Encyclopedia," 341). Given the primacy of experience [*Erfahrung*] for both Benjamin and Adorno (Jay, *Experience*, 313-19, 342-46), this notion can also be extended to interrogate Schelling, a thinker who dispenses with an epistemically localizable subject wholesale, in favor of thought "experiments."[259] Finally, both Adorno and Benjamin elaborate a metaphysics of "natural history," which understands philosophy as allegorically proclaimed against an ur-history of transience, a model which also serves as a critical heuristic with which to evaluate previous systems of thought. Likewise, Schelling develops a similar mortuary understanding of philosophy as a practice authorized atop an ephemeral "*Ungrund,*" which invites the energy of nature to repeatedly interrupt thought. Schelling likewise employs the "living ground"—supplied by his own *Naturphilosophie*—as a hermeneutic of suspicion with which to evaluate the "Idealism" of his contemporaries, chastising the enlightenment for the forgetting of its naturalistic basis.

The actuality of philosophy can nowhere more forcefully be seen than in Schelling, for whom the abyssal ground of nature constitutes a diremptive realm against which the highest ideals of the enlightenment must test themselves. This "living ground" necessitates a negative dialectical understanding of philosophy, whereby the duplicity at the heart of nature continually contests the stability of thought, such that nature can never be finally sublated into conceptual thought. In presenting a Schellingian understanding of "nature," it is essential to grasp his divergence from the conventional enlightenment thought of nature (5.2)—typified by Kant—such that the novelty of Schelling's interventions can emerge more forcefully (5. 3). Following a discussion of Kant, the experimental "first outlines" of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* will be presented, in which nature is thought "as subject": as an autogenetic and self-organizing system of

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Adorno wishes to return to an Idealist discourse of *Spirit*. For a further defense of philosophies of *Spirit* (particularly Hegel) in the twentieth-century, see Cassirer "*Geist und Leben,*" (874-880).

[259] In English both "experience" and "experiment" share the same Latin root: "*experientia,*" which connotes the acquisition of knowledge through repeated trials— "trial, proof, or experiment" (Jay, *Experience,* 10). These notions should be seen in constellation with section 1.1, in which I position Adorno as a thinker of "the essay," that is a thinker of speculative trial arrangements and provisional constellations.

"productivity" (5.3.1). Though Schelling was once cast as some irrational-mystical vitalist summarily overcome by Hegel's conceptual sobriety (*PS,* 9-10), I argue that nature remains a deconstructive site of negativity which continually troubles thought: the diremptive natality of nature is destructive, as nature continually contests any static individual entity, and is continually marred by its own "universal duality" (*FO,*88-9). Following the presentation of nature as the "real basis" of Schelling's thought, I examine Schelling's transposition of the tensions of nature into the domain of "spirit" (or philosophy) by way of a reading of his 1809 *Freedom Essay (*5.3.2)*,* along with his 1815 *Ages of the World* (5.3.3)*.* Within these texts I present Schelling as a thinker of the "negative dialectic" who gives us the resources to think the philosophical system, along with its possible negative transgression (in "evil" and "disease"), allowing the practice of thought to be understood in a "natural-historical" manner.

Following Adorno's recognition of the link between epistemological conceptual thinking and the domination of nature, one should endeavor to think philosophy in a non-oppressive, though nonetheless systematic matter, such that it is able to allow nature to "arise philosophically" (Schelling, *Ideas,* 5). Adorno's solutions to this impasse, via his model of philosophy as "constellations," has been discussed in 1.4.1 & 2.2 of this dissertation. Schelling attempts a similar task of honoring nature (or "the object") philosophically, attempting to transfer the dynamism of nature into the very form of philosophy (Matthews, xii-iii; Grant, 1). Further, in Schelling's essayistic, or "draft like" thinking, the self-troubling, or auto-deconstruction of German Idealism is highly evident: he seemingly erected entire systems and projects, only to destroy them, starting again from scratch, continuing to "carry out his education in public"—a thinker who constantly, "began again from the beginning" (Hegel, *History 3,* 513, 515).[260] Schelling's inability to ever complete his system definitively, thus grounding the possibility of a positive theodicy — his perpetual remainder on the level of the "outline," draft, or "essay"—

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[260] Further describing Schelling's draft like and essayistic style, Hegel writes: "In the various presentations of his views, Schelling on each occasion began again from the beginning, because...what went before him did not satisfy him; he has ever pressed on to seek a new form, and thus he tried various forms and terminologies in succession without ever setting forth one in succession, one complete and consistent whole" (Hegel, *History,* 3*,* 515).

depicts the Faustian bargain of *Naturphilosophie:* to do justice to nature *in itself* (autogenetically), necessitates a fracturing of the stability of the philosophical architectonic (as understood by Kant). In striving to present the dynamic and duplicitous moments of nature within philosophy, Schelling inaugurates a troubled system of thought, one which is constantly called into question via a dialogue with the alterity of nature. Paradoxically, Schelling's fecundity as a thinker, his vital plasticity, and his problem of "beginning," mirrors, on the level of form, the incessant (and oftentimes destructive) "productivity" of nature. As will be argued, this productivity should be considered autogenetic (contra autopoietic), whereby the dynamism of nature threatens any possible recuperation within a closed immunitary system of thought. As in natural history, transience, diremption, ruin, and allegory have the last word.

For Schelling, nature can permeate philosophy, even supply it with its "ground," provided this ground remain abyssal, an *Ungrund* with which any possible philosophy of *Spirit* must reckon. Schelling's "naturalistic" ground of philosophy does not provide any stable reconciliation between freedom and necessity, nor does it wholly dispense with normativity, but rather, it provokes a reciprocal troubling and articulation of philosophy and nature by way of each other. This tensioned mosaic is made possible by Schelling's revised conception of "the copula," which allows philosophy to hold together divergent moments via their identity-in-difference.[261] In his early *Naturphilosophie* (1797-1800)*, much of Schelling's novel understanding of the philosophical system arises from his refashioning of the Kantian conception of "Organism," which overflows its restrictions within the architectonic of reason, providing Schelling with a schema by which to think a systemic philosophy of spirit in a dynamic manner that allows for an ongoing and active exchange between philosophy and nature, or the "ideal" and "real" moments of thought (Matthews, 6-8, 12, 15, 17-18, 21). Though Schelling's early *Naturphilosophie* allows for speculative cross-pollinations between spirit and nature, it is in his middle philosophy

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[261] Schelling's notion of the copula has much in common with Hegel's notion the "speculative proposition" (*PS,* 36-40). Hegel describes such a proposition in terms of a back-and-forth movement between subject and predicate, as one term is continually "thrown back" upon the other, forcing one to "learn from experience that we meant something other than we meant to mean; and this correction of our meaning compels out knowing to go back to the proposition, and understand it in some other way" (*PS,* 39).

that the autogenesis of nature short circuits Idealism's absolute pretensions: "The middle work is the after-shock of the blow dealt to Idealism by the earth and life sciences" (Rajan, "Natural history," 193).

## 5.2    The "Crooked Timber" of Enlightenment: Kant and the Fate of Nature

"Nothing straight can be constructed from such warped wood as that which man is made of. Nature only requires of us that we should approximate to this idea." Kant, "Idea for a Universal History," 46.

In articulating Schelling's *Naturphilosophie,* it is useful to study the extent to which his dynamic metaphysics departs from, while inhabiting, the Kantian subjective epistemological conception of philosophy. Kant's mature "critical" philosophy (1781-1789) should be seen as revolutionizing the basic methodological orientation of philosophy. Previously, philosophy had sought to begin with some secure foundation of certainty (Descartes' "cogito," or Lockean, "sense experience"), upon which a secure edifice of thought could be geometrically deduced (Adorno, *Epistemology,* 6-8). With Kant, one instead commences "transcendentally," with the "*quid juris"* assumption of basic conditions of "possible experience" (*CPR,* 219-221; Deleuze, *Kant,* 13). Kantian philosophy begins with an assumption of the primacy of epistemology (over metaphysics), positing the constitutive role played by the epistemological subject (or "the transcendental unity of apperception") in the construction of the world of experience, along with any possible architectonic of reason.

However, Kant's primacy of epistemology has dire consequences for the thought of nature, as this "autopoietic" sidelining of nature in the architectonic of pure reason represents yet another instance of the lowly destiny of nature, which within the philosophical tradition following the pre-Socratics, was never given its due in an "autogenetic" sense.  Instead, nature's complexity is sacrificed for the stability of the philosophical system, or the general level of the concept. "Autopoiesis," following Maturana and Varela, can be defined as a system (such as the biological cell) that is able to maintain itself via a regulation of its boundaries and composition, taking new information back into itself, and regulating it by way of an organic concept of wholeness (66-8, 82-4, 88; Rajan, "Immunitary," 40-41, 46). "Autogenesis," refers to systems which generate chaotic and unruly moments out of themselves, or auto-immune systems which are potentially detrimental to their own immunity protections, or to the stability of their

organization. Schelling should be seen as one who conceives of nature "autogenetically," theorizing nature in a manner that perpetually disrupts any possible philosophy of *Spirit* (Rajan, "Immunitary," 40). Autogenesis is the logic of natural history as understood by Benjamin and Adorno, a logic of change, transience, and interruption.

Kant's subjective epistemological reorientation had immense implications for philosophizing about nature, which is denied any meaningful "constitutive" status, or autonomy in and for itself, as nature's ontological metaphysical complexity is reduced to a mere occasion for subjective autonomy and ethics. Kant's subjective-Idealist revolution robs philosophy of its "living ground," and "alibies the excision of nature itself from metaphysics" (Schelling, *FE,* 26; Grant, 7). Despite such erasures, Grant will assert— with specific reference to post-Kantian Idealism-Romanticism—that all philosophy conducted after Kant would take place within the "Kantian territory," or with Adorno, within the Kantian "force-field" (59, 9-12; *Kant,* 4). This is to say, philosophies of nature after Kant could not commence by simply rejecting Kant's interventions, but rather, they must tarry with Kant's terminology, with notions such as the organism as "natural purpose" (*Naturzweck*) and the distinction between "regulative and constitutive" ideas. For the purposes of this chapter, discussion will be limited to the main works of Kant's "critical project" (1781-1789), though this is not to deny the influence of Kant's other works—specifically the *Opus Postumum* (1936)*,* and the *Metaphysical Foundations for Natural Science* (1786)[262]—on post-Kantian Idealism, but rather, to highlight the troublesome implications for the thinking of nature latent in Kant's critical project for the "unity of reason" (*CPR,* 387-8; Deleuze, *Kant,* 68).

The question of nature is latently implicated in several vexing moments of the critical program, most notably in the discussion of "the sublime" (*CPJ,* 134-149*)*, "genius" (*CPJ,* 186-195), "organism" (*CPJ,* 244-52*),* and "natural teleology" (*CPJ,* 261-84) along with Kant's famous "third antinomy" between "nature" (understood as mechanistic necessity) and "freedom" (understood as ethical spontaneity). Particularly in

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[262] For a detailed reconstruction of the relationship between Kant's critical project, and his later *Opus Postumum,* see Beiser, *Idealism* (180-214). Broadly stated, Kant's *Metaphysical Foundations* is consistent with the critical project (and its excision of nature), while the *Opus,* is speculatively divergent, as Kant seemingly invites Idealist invasions of his philosophical program.

the sublime, just as one encounters in nature "an abyss in which [one] fears to lose [one]self," the faculty of reason intervenes, reminding one of an inner ethical-judgmental "power" higher than that of nature, allowing "the mind" to make "palpable to itself...its own vocation even over nature" (*CPJ,* 141, 144-7). These ambiguous moments highlight the "phantasmatic," or "tangled" (Krell, *Contagion,* 11), status of nature in the critical project, which can be read as a cipher to broader pathological moments of the Kantian program.[263]

In the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/3)*,* Kant is forthright in positioning his philosophy as a "revolution" akin to the scientific interventions of Copernicus and Newton (*CPR,* 110-3). Hitherto, philosophy had been a mere capricious and dogmatic use of the imagination, though now that a "critique" of its foundations had been completed, philosophy (as the working out of "synthetic a priori judgments") could take its rightful (albeit minor) place amongst the faculties of knowledge (*Conflict,* 25, 43-5). In justifying his methodological novelty, Kant continually positions philosophy as a "new science" in dialogue with the physical sciences and mathematics, which are upheld as the guarantors of truth towards which philosophy should aspire (*Prolegomena,* 2-3, 11: *CPR,* 108-10, 140, 129).[264] Taking its cue from the (*a priori*) mathematical-sciences, Kant's formal critical method expunged the tangled realm of nature from philosophy, demonstrating another instance of the lowly fate of nature in the tradition of thought.

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[263] Gasché elaborates Bataille's logic of the "phantasm": a "scientific myth" (1), or a constellation of downcast moments left out of Hegel's sojourn of *Spirit*. This concept will be further elaborated in 6.1.2 of this dissertation. Gasché is perhaps too critical of the Hegelian program, wholly exploding it by way its abject moments. Instead, as I will argue in Chapter 6, Hegel's encyclopedia can be read alongside its phantasmatic offshoots, as part of a broader "general economy" of philosophy.

[264] Kant's ongoing dialogue with mathematics throughout his critical project is complex. At key junctures in Kant's elaboration of the task of philosophy as a form "syllogistic reasoning," that is, as the exercise of "synthetic a priori judgments" about the world, Kant appeals to mathematics as an exemplary case which demonstrates (to the skeptical empiricist) how far philosophy can go independent of experience: "Mathematics gives us a splendid example of how far we can go with *a priori* cognition independent of experience" (*CPR* 129, 140). Schelling (in his "The Nature of Philosophy as Science") is critical of Kant's favoring of a unified mathematical understanding of philosophy (against the pathological accidents of philosophy): "It is as though one preferred a sterometrically regular crystal" which "has no possibility of falling ill, while [philosophy] hosts germs of every possible illness" (212). Adorno is likewise highly critical of such a "mathematicization" of philosophy as a "model of unity" which "brings the manifold of experience to its abstraction" (*Epistemology,* 9-10). Benjamin likewise criticized Kant from the perspective of mathematics, speculating regarding new models of philosophical grounding afforded by non-standard math (as I have argued in 3.1.1).

Despite Kant's desire for apodictic certainty, which would be attained with reason's self-critical elevation to the status of a science, Kant recognizes the inherent "speculative interest of reason," which is constantly involving itself (dialectically) in false problematics and "illusions" beyond the tribunal of "possible experience" (*CPR,* 384-6). Such an inborn proclivity of reason to speculate, metaphysically overstepping the boundaries of possible experience, must be tamed and put to work within Kant's sober architectonic of philosophy. In fact, such a motif of domestication runs throughout the Kantian project of reason: ideas (the purview of reason) must be restrained by way of the understanding; desire must be subjugated in the service of ethics; and individual "tastes" must be buttressed by a communitarian vision of humanity. As such, Kant conducts a great philosophical rapprochement, "the limitation of knowledge... in the service of faith" (*CPR,* 117), or rather, the employment of the speculative ideas of reason in a "problematic" or "regulative" sense (in the interest of practical reason), such that they serve the purpose of grounding his moral world view. Stated otherwise, philosophy can become a *Fachwissenschaft* or "specialized science" (Zamitto, *Kant, Herder,* 1-14), under the condition it recognize the limited nature of what can be known "a priori" by way of synthetic judgments. Philosophy can deduce (and clarify) the categories of the understanding in relation to the "transcendental unity of apperception" and the forms of sensibility, or "intuition" (*CPR,* 210-4, 245-8, 153-85), but it cannot speculate idly, nor become needlessly obsessed with its own problematics. Reason as a faculty is granted a speculative, though limited purview as its "higher ideals"—such as the existence of God and the immortality of the soul —are granted a "practical interest" (Deleuze *Kant*, 6-7). Speculation beyond the bounds of possible experience can be efficacious, provided it regulatively grounds the greater science of morality (or "practical reason").

Within Kant's highly bureaucratic and *a priori* unity of reason, the empirical, or "nature" more generally, cannot be known *in-itself,* nor can it reciprocally influence the transcendental.[265] Instead, nature can be comprehended only "formally"; that is,

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[265] By this I do not mean to rehearse the tired criticism of Kant as some Berkleyian Idealist who denies wholly the existence of the external world. Such a view is intellectually ungenerous and is critically dealt with throughout the "B Edition" of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (see. *CPR,* 326-337). There is much evidence to support a reading of Kant as a "direct realist," and such a view has been extensively defended

according to the *a priori* necessary laws which govern its appearance in the epistemic subject. Nature, as a site of sensuous experience essentially drops out. Even in the *Critique of Judgment,* the manifold complexity of the natural world is reined in by the regulative imposition of an "organic whole," and nature is thus granted a merely subjective place within the transcendental architectonic. However, Kant's regulative governance of the natural world unwittingly weakens his attempt to repress the complexity of nature, as "empirical chaos" continually remains a threat to the Kantian project (Allison, *Taste,* 38; Ng, 31-6).[266]

The divergent "interests of reason"—particularly between ethics and speculative philosophy— pose evident problems for Kant's desire to construct a unitary "architectonic of pure reason" (*CPR,* 387-8, 691-701), a tension which is explicitly figured in his "Third antinomy of Pure Reason" (*CPR,* 484-9). Here Kant presents "the chasm" between a deterministic vision of nature, understood as subservient to causal laws, and the ethical "spontaneity" of the autonomous subject: its ability to judge for itself coupled by its capacity to act ethically by "giving the law to itself." Kant's "transcendental freedom" (*CPR,* 486) responds to such a dilemma by severing the world into the "sensuous" realm of nature (understood as subservience to *phenomenal* laws of appearance), and the "intelligible" (or *noumenal*) realm of ethical and epistemic autonomy. Kant's critical philosophy is another instance in which the lushness of nature is sacrificed for the generalizable level of the concept and the stability of the philosophical system.

Given Kant's commitment to a "transcendental" mode of explanation—that is, an immanent deduction of reason according to its own laws—his splitting of world into *phenomena* and *noumena* begets intractable problems from the standpoint of genesis: how can the world be at once causally determined, while also giving rise to a "free"

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by Henry Allison, see *Kant's Transcendental Idealism* (4-6, 20-49). Deleuze echoes such sentiments, asserting: "Empirical realism is a constant feature of [Kantian] critical philosophy" (*Kant,* 14).

[266] Allison defines "empirical chaos" or "disorder at the empirical level" as a scenario in which the uniformity (of the organic whole) that the transcendental imposed upon nature does not hold, as situations in which nature's empirical unruliness continually threatens Kant's transcendental deduction (*Taste,* 37-38). As Allison writes, "it is a scenario in which the uniformity of nature that necessarily exhibits in virtue of its conformity to the transcendental laws imposed by the very nature of the understanding does not translate into an empirically accessible uniformity..." (*Taste,* 38).

subject which is capable of transcending givenness through self-determinate ethical maxims? Put otherwise, though Kant can provide a consistent transcendental account of nature, along with a rational-practical system of ethics, he is unable to mediate between the two domains. Kant cannot articulate the transition from the realm of nature to that of *Spirit* within the confines of his subjective epistemology; that is, unless he begs a plethora metaphysical questions which his philosophy so ardently attempts to limit.

Kant's 1790 *Critique of the Power of Judgment (CPJ)* attempts to "mediate" between the realms of "freedom" and "necessity" (or the determinate laws of nature), through the newly "discovered" faculty of judgment which, "makes possible the transition from the domain of the concept of nature to that of the concept of freedom" (*CPJ,* 82, 8, 44-45, 60-3, 80-3). Specifically, Kant's notion of "reflective judgment"— distinguished from "determinant judgment" in which "the particular" is schematized under "the universal"— generates a universal out of a particular, as in teleological and aesthetic judgments, and allows Kant to think nature and its relation to the subject in a more dynamic, though "regulatively" limited, manner (*CPJ,* 15-20, 26; Matthews, 69). After the elucidation of reflective judgment by way of the aesthetic (of the beautiful and the sublime), in the second part of the *CPJ* Kant undertakes a critique of "teleological judgment," which entertains questions regarding the cognition of nature "as a whole" (*CPJ*, 231-283). In considering nature and thinking natural purposiveness, Kant allows that the faculty of judgment posit ("problematically") the existence of an "organic whole," or "organism," which allows for the thought of reciprocal relations between "part and whole," and for the thought of the unity and diversity of the natural world as a "self-organizing being" (*CPJ,* 245, 244-7).

Though the idea of such an organism exists nowhere in nature, nor can one experience its existence, thinking nature "organically" allows for "a system of possible empirical cognitions," a "unity of kinship" amidst the "multiplicity and diversity of empirical laws" (*CPJ,* 13). That is, the Kantian organism figures the possibility of a new science of nature grounded in the architectonic of reason. Kant permits himself such speculative excesses under the proviso that his analysis remains "regulative"— it ascribes no ontological "constitutive" existence to its impositions— one must think nature "as-if" its polyphony progresses teleologically within a self-organizing whole (*CPJ,* 234).

Though Kant opens a new discussion of nature—performing a "great service to philosophy" (Hegel, *SOL,* 654; Ng, 23-27)—he simultaneously autopoietically tames the unruliness of natural spontaneity within his merely regulative understanding "natural purpose." The Kantian idea keeps the unruly autogenesis of nature in check, attempting to put its dynamic fecundity to work within the system of reason. In post-Kantian Idealism-Romanticism, this notion of organism will be liberated from its Kantian confines and will allow Schelling to think "nature as *subject*" or "productivity," in an autogenetic manner, that is, as unbound from its regulation within the economy of an autopoietic system, permitting nature to be seen in a disruptive and unruly relation to any possible system of philosophy.

## 5.3    Schelling, from *Naturphilosophie* to Theodicy (or Nature and System)

> "To philosophize about nature means to heave it out of the dead mechanism to which it seems predisposed, to quicken it with freedom and it set it into its own free development." Schelling, *First Outline,*14.

Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* (1797-1800)*,* along with the broad outlines of his "identity-philosophy" (1800-9), arose in direct dialogue with the antagonisms opened by the Kantian understanding of nature and the epistemic position of the philosophical subject. As a thinker of nature, Schelling radically critiques many stalwart assumptions regarding the relationship of the epistemic subject to the natural world, and as such, is a theorist of immense contemporary efficacy in an age of increased ecological consciousness, providing valuable concepts, ideas, and thought models through which one can meta-critically reflect on potential models for the thought of nature. As will be demonstrated throughout the following sections, the question of nature quickly leads to questions of the philosophical system: what form should philosophy take such that it can do justice to the complexities of nature *in-itself*? The following sections will present Schelling as a thinker of the negative dialectic, that is, as one who attempts to incorporate the "original duality of nature," into the philosophical system, providing a tensioned, though genetic, understanding of the philosophical system. Schelling transfers the abysses and contradictions of nature into philosophy, such that the possibility of philosophy as a self-identical system is existentially troubled. As such, Schelling will be

seen as a thinker who provides the mechanisms to think the philosophical system, along with its transgression, in vibrant and autogenetic directions.

Given the current prevalence of a techno-scientific world view, along with its imposed positivist understanding of the history of philosophy, the movement known as *Naturphilosophie* in Germany is generally regarded as anathema and summarily relegated to the dustbin of history as a mystical relapse to pre-Kantian "dogmatic" metaphysics, as yet another attempt to dress up a transcendent pantheism for the philosophical public. With respect to Hegel (in the Anglosphere), it is commonplace to excise—or simply disregard—the entirety of his philosophy of nature as a remnant of a "metaphysical Hegel," which must be eradicated if he is to be seen as the "*Staatsphilsoph*" of normativity (Furlotte, 1- 9; Hammer, "Introduction," 3-5). With respect to Schelling, such pre-scientific associations have led many historians of philosophy to downplay the dynamic qualities of his thinking, leading him to be seen as a mystical intuitionist—for whom "all cows are black" (Hegel, *PS,* 9)—one who was summarily dismissed and overcome by Hegel (Žižek, *Indivisible,* 5-8). Against such dismissals, Beiser asserts that one must see *Naturphilosophie* as "inseparable" from the "absolute Idealism" of Schelling and Hegel (*Idealism*, 506), providing a coming philosophy of *Spirit* with its naturalistic "living ground." Bowie, Grant, and Žižek go further, stressing the continual relevance of *Naturphilosophie* in the formulation of a "post-empiricist" philosophy of science, thus seeing Schelling as a "vanishing mediator" (to refashion Žižek) between German Idealism and contemporary concerns (30-1; vii-iii, 3; *Indivisible,* 8). Following such commentators, I present Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* as a dynamic space in which innovative metaphysical thought models are elaborated in response to the antinomies and limitations of the Kantian understanding of philosophy as epistemology. In Adorno's terms, Schelling moves philosophy, "against epistemology," commencing with the "primacy of the object": with the autogenesis of nature which troubles any stable epistemic subject (Adorno, *Epistemology,* 1-8, 22-28; *ND,* 183-88). *Naturphilosophie* is inextricably linked with the practice of metaphysics, though not of a pre-Kantian dogmatic variety. The metaphysics in question is one which places the transcendental in continual dialogue with its outside (empirical nature), opening up a multiplicitous interplay between the form and content of knowledge, and the "real" and "ideal"

moments of philosophy (*FO,* 194; *STI,* 199).[267] Such an energetic interchange allows Schelling to "naturalize" traditionally ideal philosophical concepts—such as God, freedom, good-evil, and the philosophical system – allowing nature *in-itself,* to "arise philosophically" (*FO,* 14), continually troubling any ideal philosophical artifice erected upon it.

In seeking to parse the relationship between Schelling's early *Naturphilosophie* (1797- 1800) and the remainder of his oeuvre, one enters into vexing periodization debates regarding Schelling's corpus as a whole, specifically the status of his *Naturphilosophie* in relation to his middle work (1809-1821) and later positive philosophy of mythology and revelation. I follow Grant and Matthews in recognizing the continual importance of *Naturphilosophie* throughout Schelling's corpus as its "real basis" (3-5; 7-20), though I also follow Bowie (13-14), and McGrath (2), who articulate Schelling's work in terms of "overlapping stages"; thus his "ideal" philosophy should be seen as grounded in—while reciprocally influencing—his early thinking of nature. If *Naturphilosophie* remains "the ground" of Schelling's thinking, then, as in the *Freedom* essay, it is a dynamic ground that remains generative and productive, an *Ungrund* at the heart of nature that incessantly problematizes any possible philosophy of spirit.

In Schelling's *First Outline* (exemplary of his *Naturphilosophie*), Schelling attempts to theorize nature in terms of a series of self-organizing stages in progression towards the absolute, but "life"—or the ceaseless fecundity of the natural world—struggles against the normative concept of nature (5.3.1). In his middle *FE,* the ruinous and generative abysses of nature are probed by way of the transgressive force of evil, though Schelling covers over this negativity in the service of his theodical narrative, and in an attempt to salvage a transition from nature to *Spirit* (5.3.2). In the 1815 *Ages of the*

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[267] In the "Introduction" to his *First Outline,* Schelling defines the "real and ideal" moments of philosophy as two converging perspectives on the same absolute: "According to this view, since Nature is only the visible organism of our understanding...it follows that therefore...the ideal must arise out of the real the real and admit of explanation from it....If it is the task of transcendental philosophy to subordinate the real to the ideal, it is, on the other hand, the task of the philosophy of nature to explain the ideal by the real. The two sciences are therefore but one science, differentiated only in the opposite orientation of their tasks" (*FO,* 194). Such sentiments are mirrored in the *System of Transcendental Idealism,* which sees "the ideal" perspective of philosophy as articulating "consciously" what is merely "unconscious" in ("real") natural processes (3-4, 11-12).

*World,* this theosophical closure collapses, and Schelling is led to confront the history of nature as a primal scene of ruin and trauma, one reminiscent of Adorno and Benjamin's notion of natural history, or the negative dialectic (5.4.1).

### 5.3.1 Schelling's "First Outlines" of *Naturphilosophie* (1797-1800)
"The greater the scientific advance, the more primitive the fear." Don DeLillo, *White Noise,* 73.

*Naturphilosophie* seeks to deduce a "naturalistic yet non-mechanistic foundation" for philosophy in which subject and object, ideal(ism) and real(ism), and transcendental and empirical are seen as emanating from an "original duality" between universal "productivity," or "nature as subject," and "products," or "nature as object" ( Beiser, *Idealism*; 508; *FO,* 6-1; Grant, 2-3).[268] The main contours of Schellingian *Naturphilosophie* are worked out between 1797 and 1800 in his *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* (*Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur,* 1797)*, On the World Soul* (*Von der Weltseele,* 1797)*,* and his, *First Outline for a Philosophy of Nature* (*Erster Entwurf eines Systems der Naturphilosophie,* 1799).[269] Fundamental motifs from his *Naturphilosophie* resurge in his "middle work" (1809-23), notably in the *Freedom* essay*,* and *The Ages of the World* (*Die Weltalter,* particularly the 1815 version)*,* whereby nature provides the "living ground" out of which any possible philosophy of sprit must arise, as systems of thought are speculatively tested against the "productivity" of nature (*FE,* 26). Originally a disciple of Fichte, Schelling initially positioned his thought of nature as supplementing the Fichtean modification of transcendental philosophy, though very soon *Naturphilosophie* attained its own autonomy, and Schelling came to see the Fichtean *Wissenschaftslehre* as being completed within the broader envelope of *Naturphilosophie,* the latter serving as the "real ground" from which transcendental inquiry should

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[268] Schelling describes an "original duality that must simply be presupposed in nature" between "nature as subject" or nature thought in terms of productivity, and "nature as object" referring to the individual "products" of nature (*FO,* 16-1).

[269] In foregrounding Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* in this manner, I follow Rajan and to some extent Krell. Rajan gives primacy to Schelling's *First Outline* as a plenitudinous "text" (in the Barthesian sense) rather than "a work." My focus on the *Stufenfolge* and natural history is indebted to her ("Lecture" (2020); "Evolution," 153, 162-5; "Immuniary," 40, 42, 44, 48-51; "Natural History," 1-10). Krell (in *Contagion*), takes up Schelling's discussion of disease, elevating it as the apex of the text, and reading it as anticipating many of Schelling's "middle" themes in his *Freedom* essay (73-114).

commence (Beiser, *Idealism,* 489- 505). In this section I foreground a reading of Schelling's *First Outline* in terms of "natural history"—in the sense elaborated by Benjamin (4.3.2) and Adorno (1.3)—such that an autogenetic transience is given primacy against the autopoietic systems of the Kantian epistemological subject. That is, though Schelling attempts to contain the dynamism of nature by way of the "series of stages" progressing towards the absolute (*FO,* 53), the empirical chaos of the natural world struggles against his normative attempts at closure.

Though Schelling is evidently critical of Kantian-Fichtean subjective Idealism, it is essential to comprehend the extent to which Schelling continually tarries with the Kantian question of the transcendental, along with its architectonic conception of philosophy. In this way, Schelling should be seen as providing what Malabou, writing on Kant, calls an "epigenesis" of the transcendental (Malabou, *Epigenesis* 16): examining possible extensions and expansions of the transcendental program of philosophy in a manner akin to the early Benjamin (as I have shown in 3.0). In working through the Kantian program Schelling forwards an absolute Idealism which sees "reason" as manifesting in natural processes, along with the epistemological subject, the latter coming to be seen as a "fold"—or as the "highest potency"— within the broader productive unfolding of the absolute (*Ideas,* 30, 42, 49-50; *FO,* 14; Beiser, *Idealism* 533; Bowie, 38).[270] That is, Schelling experimentally tests the regulative ideas of reason by way of a speculative invasions from the dynamics of the natural world, opening the transcendental by way of "empirical chaos" (*FO,* 5-6; Allison, *Taste,* 37-38). Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* is not some mystical-empiricism, materialism, or vitalism that dispenses wholly with the mediatory role of the transcendental subject; instead, Schelling's thinking seeks to "quicken nature with freedom" *(FO,* 14), undertaking thought experiments by way of natural processes, which are then allowed the space of dialogue, reciprocally influencing the "ideal" moment of philosophy. Merleau-Ponty describes Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* as not a particular theory, but rather, as an "attitude with respect to Being," one which tries to think the "excess of Being over the

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[270] Schelling can be thought of as (re)connecting epistemology with its metaphysical-ontological "living ground," as Hegel would likewise attempt with his *SO.* As Hegel writes, "the dead bones of logic [must] be quickened by spirit and become substance and content" (*SOL,* 32, 11-22, 40-3. See further, Ng, 8-13).

consciousness of Being" (48, 47). Hence, notions such as "freedom," "God," "the system" are thought within the broader organic fold of "nature" that allows for the creation of hybrid, "natural-historical," concepts (Rajan, "Lecture" [2020]). Not only are ideas, concepts, and intuitions seen in a material natural sense as immanent to nature, but throughout Schelling's oeuvre history (or *Spirit*) can be viewed allegorically as articulating, and participating in, the same forces latent in nature. Natural processes prefigure philosophy as "the original, as yet unconscious poetry of the spirit" (*STI*, 12, 199-200). It should be stressed that, contra Kant and other Romantics, Schelling does not view nature and the subject as united by a shared immunitary autopoiesis, but rather, by a more pathological model of autogenesis, in which disease and the calamity often prevail over immunity and unity. Nature can be read as history, while history (as an exercise of human freedom) continues natures generative unfolding, though not in any fixed, or teleological manner.[271]

Conceptually speaking, Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* dispenses with several key assumptions of Kantian-Fichtean subjective Idealism. Most notably, the Kantian "*thing-in-itself*" (*Ideas*, 49), along with Kant's cautionary border between "regulative" and constitutive ideas; while Schelling also enlarges the speculative role played by intuition in theoretical cognition (*US,* 46-49; Wirth, *Conspiracy,* 102-129). Schelling contributes to the post-Kantian "fate of reason" in which a generation of thinkers—such as S. Maimon, A. Schultz, Fichte, and K. L. Reinhold— "meta-critically" worked through the Kantian project, experimentally articulating alternative relations between the various Kantian faculties (Beiser, *Reason,* 4-15; Deleuze, *Kant,* 68).

Instead of the Kantian dualism (or "the great chasm") between "appearances" and "things-in-themselves," Schelling parses nature in terms of the "original duality" between general "productivity" and finite "products": the former, as pure process or universal becoming, cannot appear as such, except through its various manifestations in particular

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[271] In such a manner, Adorno (following the Freud of *Civilization and its Discontents*) develops pathological readings of the historical process, in which history can be seen as the manifestation of traumatic natural developments (*NH,* 163-5; *ND,* 307).

"products" (*FO,* 16, 5-6, 197-206).[272] The whole of Schelling's *First Outline* circles around the difficulty of thinking nature in terms of this "universal duality": of conceiving nature simultaneously as originary and constant productivity, alongside the "inhibition" of this *ur-* productivity by "actants," such that it manifests as particular entities (*FO,* 197, 18-9, 31, 35). Schelling describes this duality via the leitmotif of "a stream," which when "resisted" or "inhibited" forms "whirlpools":

> *Example:* a stream flows in a straight line forward as long as it encounters no resistance. Where there is resistance—a whirlpool forms. Every original product of nature is such a whirlpool, every organism. The whirlpool is not something immobilized, it is rather something constantly transforming—but reproduced anew at each moment. Thus no product in nature is *fixed,* but it is reproduced at each instant through the force of nature entire...nature as a whole co-operates in every product...Nature is originally pure identity—nothing to be distinguished in it. Now, points of inhibition appear, against which, as limitations to its productivity, Nature constantly struggles. While it struggles against them, however, it fills this sphere again with its productivity. (*FO,* 18, 206; cf. Benjamin, *OT,* 24-5)

Schelling repurposes natural (or "real") processes to make a philosophical (or "ideal") remark. The *ur*-productivity of nature is figured as "the stream," which is not visible in itself, but only in terms of its "products," which are "constantly transforming" and "reproduced anew at each moment." Such individual products "struggle" against the fundamental productivity of nature, and in so doing constitute themselves as "whirlpools," or points of "inhibition," only by standing in contradiction to productive nature as a whole. Further, "productivity" does not cease in individual "products," and via the Idealist philosophical perspective, as with Leibniz's "monads" (*FO,* 20-1), one is able to intuit the presence of the absolute productive whole continually working itself out in individual products.[273] Schelling's text presents an experimental thought environment

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[272] This duality can be thought in terms of the Kantian distinction between *noumena* (productivity) and *phenomena* (products)*,* though, for Schelling, the *noumena* (or *natura naturans*) remains deeply diremptive and cannot be hypostasized or reified.

[273] As with Leibniz's monads, individual "actants" should be seen as mirroring the broader trajectories of nature, with individual "products" elucidating universal "productivity." See, Leibniz, "Monadology" (76-7). Schelling describes the necessity of a monadological perspective for research into nature: "To gras*p Nature as the universal production of Ideas, we* must go back to the origin and significance of Ideas themselves. Their origin lies in the eternal law of the Absolute, i.e., that it is its own object. In virtue of this law, God's productivity is the process by which the universal essence of the whole is embodied in particular forms. Thereby, these forms, though particular, are at the same time self-contained worlds-what philosophers call *Monads or Ideas*" (*US,* 115).

in which ideas, intuitions and hypotheses are continually tested; and, while there is no subject in the text (thus no "experience"), there is the more fundamental notion of "experiment," in which Schelling assesses various thought experiments as speculative means to order the productivity of nature (Rajan, "Immunitary," 46). Describing the experimental thought environment of his *Naturphilosophie,* Schelling writes, "From now on there is no longer any separation between experience and our mind, and only now, once the great synthesis [between mind and nature] has been accomplished, does our knowledge return to analysis (to research and experiment)" (*Ideas,* 30).[274]

Schelling's refashioned conception of "intellectual intuition" (or "intellectual perception," *Intellektuelle Anschauung*), allows one to grasp the manifestation of the infinite absolute ("productivity") as it presents in finite entities ("products"). Such an apparent division is grounded in the fundamental "identity" (or organic whole) that is "nature," which can be grasped directly, without the aid of a concept or sensation (*FO,* 136). As he describes in his "Erlangen lecture" (1821), "intellectual perception" forces the subject "outside of itself, into a relation of "ecstasy," such that philosophy can begin with an intuition of the whole in "amazement" (228-9).[275] Schelling emphatically proclaims, "Without intellectual intuition no philosophy!" speaking to the centrality of intuition for both his *Naturphilosophie* and philosophy of identity (*US,* 49; 73-5). In fact, "speculative philosophy" as a philosophical task is conditioned by this expanded role for intuition (Cerf, xi). Such a "new hope" conferred on the "productive intuition," mirrors that accorded to "the imagination," which Schelling elevates to a new role beyond its task of schematization in the Kantian *CPR* (Beiser, *Idealism,* 579-80, 582; Wirth*, Conspiracy,* 86-88, 102). Through intuition one can (non-discursively) presuppose an organic image of "the whole," in which manifold parts can manifest themselves and be ordered, allowing for an organization of the world that radicalizes Kant's conception of "the

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[274] In this manner, Schelling's "experiment" should be seen as a transformative "experience" [*Erfahrung*] in the Adorno-Benjamin sense.

[275] In the lecture, Schelling asserts that philosophy "is not a demonstrative science," but rather a "surrender" to a "free act of the spirit" (227). That is, as Schelling describes (227-9), the absolute (subject) cannot be grasped conceptually (via "knowledge"), but only via "intellectual perception," which intuitively sees the absolute in all things. Schelling assertions regarding such an intuitive starting point for philosophy should be seen in contradistinction to Fichte's Idealist provisos at the outset of his *Wissenschaftslehre* (see Fichte, 20, 17-20).

organism" (against his own architectonic image of philosophy): providing a more dynamic and self-reflective interplay of parts and whole. In asserting the primacy of intuition against discursive conceptual cognition, Schelling contests the architectonic stability of philosophy by allowing alternative logics (to the concept) a constitutive philosophical role (Wirth, *Conspiracy* 102). In the course of Schelling's oeuvre, intuition's non-discursivity forms an affinity with a duplicitous (though nonetheless critical) mysticism, a site which allows the "phantasm," or the night of consciousness into the thought of philosophy, a trauma which, I will argue, becomes more pronounced in the middle *Freedom* essay and *Weltalter* project.

Schelling's ontological suppositions remain transcendental in that they provide a "real deduction" of the conditions of possibility for the appearance of any finite product in nature out of the originary flux of productivity (Peterson, "Introduction, "*FO,* xxii). Schelling stresses the Kantian elements of his philosophical enterprise: philosophy must present both the conditions of possibility for nature itself, along with our experience of it (through the various physical sciences). Philosophy must explain the genesis of our categories of cognition, alongside the ontological genesis of the natural world. Schelling describes this dual transcendental task for philosophy: "the Philosophy of Nature ought to deduce the possibility of nature, that is of the all-inclusive world of experience, from first principles" (*Ideas,* 9). In this way, the distinction between mind and matter—or the Kantian "form and content" of knowledge—is rethought in favour of a model which understands mind as the highest "potency" of the productivity of nature: "Nature should be Mind made visible, Mind the invisible nature" (*Ideas*, 42, 49; *STI,* 10-12, 199). The epigenetic processes of nature are mirrored by Schelling's novel "genetic method" of philosophy, which sees "organic" and "anorganic" processes as united under a shared "schema of freedom" (Matthews, xii, 1-9).[276] Further, it could be argued that Schelling

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[276] Describing his genetic model of thought, which mirrors the autogenesis and diremptive productivity of nature, Schelling writes: "Philosophy, accordingly, is nothing other than a *natural history of our mind.* From now on all dogmatism is overturned from its foundations. We consider the system of our ideas, not in its being, but in its becoming. *Philosophy becomes genetic*…it allows the whole necessary series of our ideas to arise and to take its course, as it were, before our eyes. From now on there is no longer any separation between experience and our mind, and only now, once the great synthesis has been accomplished, does our knowledge return to analysis (to research and experiment). But this system does not yet exist*"* (*Ideas,* 30). Such a sentiment is echoed in Schelling's 1815 *Ages*, though in a darker cast:

embraces a certain parallelism between subject and object, though in a much darker, mortuary manner, as the same abyssal ground of nature subtending the absolute is latent in the philosophical subject as its "unconscious" (*STI,* 12).

Curiously absent from the labyrinthine productivity of the *First Outline* is a substantial account of the epistemic subject (even as a regulative unity), as the subject is seemingly de-individualized, becoming merely one potency amongst others, a particular "monadological fold" within the broader absolute production of nature (Deleuze, *The Fold,* 3-23; Rajan, "Lecture," 2020). Schelling refashions the doctrine of "irritability" to describe the immunological relationship of the subject to its outside—thought as an equilibrium between "irritability" and "sensibility"— while also providing a monadological mirroring of the broader (dis-) equilibrium between "nature as subject" (or "productivity") and "nature as object" (or "product") (*FO*, 126, 133, 142-50; Rajan, "Excitability," 316; "Margins, 317-8).[277] The epistemic philosophical subject is dethroned from its central Kantian place as the "transcendental unity of apperception," instead becoming the "highest potency" of natural processes: mind, body, and nature should be seen as differing degrees of organization of the same principles latent in the productivity of nature (Beiser, *Idealism,* 533-7; *US*, 103). Likewise, the static Cartesian understanding of matter as a mechanical *res extensa* (inherited by Newton and Kant), is surpassed within a larger organic whole, which restores an immanent teleology to nature— a fundamental gesture of absolute Idealism (Ng, 5-6; Beiser, *Idealism,* 466-8). Such a vital understanding of nature—as a continual process of strife, in which "nature struggle[s] against everything individual" (*FO,* 8; 54)—begs the obvious question as to why nature appears as a particular in the first place: what compels the *ur*-productivity of nature to cessation in individual products (*FO,* 50, 53-4)? Further, what obliges this process to commence, why does productivity come to exist out of the "nothingness" of the abyssal ground?

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"Certainly one who could write the completely the history of their own life would have, in a small epitome, concurrently grasped the history of the cosmos" (*AW,* 3).

[277] For a genealogy of "irritability" and related terms as they appear in Schelling's work, see Rajan, "Excitability" (316).

Schelling's *First Outline* attempts the (*a priori*) "deduction of nature" in terms of a "dynamically graded series of stages" [*Stufenfolge*] (53-70, 141-58; Rajan, "Immunitary," 44-45; "Margins," 329-30). In order for *Naturphilosophie* to become a "physiogony" of nature, it must elevate itself above  Kantian "natural history," moving beyond any analysis of nature that does not proceed by way of the intuition of the organic whole, remaining a mere empirical aggregate, a "description of nature" which deals with nature in terms of its "externality" (*FO,* 53). [278] Opposed to such aggregations, authentic *Naturphilosophie* grasps nature as a productive "subject," commencing with the "*continuity of organic functions* as principle of organization," describing how this ur-productivity, "gradually brings forth the whole multiplicity of its products through continuous deviations from a common ideal" (*FO,* 53). Through such an elevation, "natural history" is able to become a "history of nature itself," that is, a demonstration of how nature can be thought simultaneously as "product" and "productivity," showing how nature is at once individual, yet also "directed toward an *absolute* organism" (*FO,* 53, 138; *STI,* 199; Wirth, *Conspiracy,* 3-29). As does Deleuze (following Spinoza and Nietzsche), Schelling reverses the traditional relation between entity and ground (or the ontological difference): the task is not to explain the universal order of "Being" by way of a particular "being," but rather, in a reversal of the traditional "method of distinction," one must endeavour to show how the universal organism of difference, or becoming, limits itself in a particular entity (Deleuze, *Difference,* 66-9). Or put more drastically, "How can individual nature hold its own against the universal organism" (*FO,* 54): why does nature "inhibit" its original productivity, or state of indifference, in the manifestation of particular entities?

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[278] Rajan (in "Immunitary," 44-5; "Natural History," 190-2; "Lecture (2020)") has drawn attention to a constellation of terms employed by Coleridge's Germanophile friend, Joseph Henry Green to describe Schelling's project as a temporalized or self-assembling graduated series of stages, a "*Stufenfolge,*" or a temporalized "great chain of being." For Green, "physiography," as the lowest form of analysis, studies various entities in nature (*natura naturata*), while "physiology" analyses the laws and powers of nature which bring about products (*natura naturans*). Finally, "physiogony" teleologically studies the manner in which nature labours in the birth of the human, seeing the graduated series of stages as working itself out in terms of increasing complexity. Rajan further asserts that such a speculative paradigm is fundamental to Idealism, a framework shared by Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*; however, the plethora of detail and complexity Hegel and Schelling attempt to incorporate troubles any possible teleological hypothesis, and such a tension remains unresolved for them both.

This tension between nature as "subject" (or "productivity, *natura naturans, becoming*"), and "object" (or "product, *natura naturata,* being[s]"), is worked out throughout Schelling's *First Outline,* which strives to figure nature as an unending productivity which ascends upwards along a series of stages, constantly annihilating (or effecting an *Aufhebung* of) individual entities as it moves up the ladder of Being (*FO,*17, 53). Yet the text also describes the autogenesis of various stages, as individual products proliferate in biodiversity (*FO,*53-4), disease, and various "misbegotten [or botched] attempts to achieve the absolute" (*FO,* 36; Krell, *Contagion,* 96-99). Such a ceaseless proliferation of particularities and spheres results in a situation in which "the details of the *Stufenfolge* unsettle the paradigm" (Rajan, "Immunitary", 50). As with Leibniz, the further one explores nature, the more monads seemingly proliferate, folding within further folds: "Each portion of matter can be conceived as a garden full of plants, and of a pond full of fish. But each branch of a plant, each limb of an animal, each drop of its humours, is still another such garden or pond" (#67, 78; "Rajan, "Immunitary," 40; Lecture," [2020]).

Read in a more radical direction, Schelling is unable (or perhaps unwilling) to resolve this inherent, though productive, duplicity of nature within the borders of the text. Despite his desire to think nature in terms of the unity of the absolute (as a *Stufenfolge*), the destructive character of nature resists such resolution:

> Visible nature, in particular and as a whole, is an allegory of this perpetually advancing and retreating movement. One generation comes, the other goes. Nature goes to the trouble to develop qualities, aspects, works, and talents to their pinnacle, only again to bury them for centuries in oblivion, and then start anew, perhaps in a new species, but certainly only to attain the same peak. (*AW*, 21)

Given the speculative character of the *FO,* and the fact that formally it remained merely an "outline-projection" [*Entwurf*], Schelling was unable to definitively resolve these antinomical trajectories of nature: between nature as a self-organising series of stages, and nature as constant autogenetic proliferation and speciation—a productivity of "life" that is constantly threatening to override any attempt at systematic closure. The essayistic style of Schelling's text ostensibly collapses under the speculative excesses of nature's processes, coupled with the amount of material Schelling attempts to theoretically potentiate. Schelling's detours create countless folds within folds, worlds within worlds.

More radically, perhaps such a desire for definitive resolution misses the important "negative dialectical" struggle at the core of Schelling's thought, as the constant motif of "struggle" recurs throughout his early to middle corpus (*FO,* 36; *FE,* 63; *AW,* 90). In his *Naturphilosophie,* Schelling allegorizes the primordial unity-in-opposition of nature via the image of the "Magnet," which contains within itself the opposition of "positive" and "negative" polarities, both of which only exist via their participation in the whole that defines the "indifference point" (or equilibrium) between oppositions (*FO*, 83-84, 152; Bowie, 40; Beiser, *Idealism,* 532; Pinkard, *Hegel,* 129-32). Such an allegory is continued in Schelling's refashioning of the doctrine of "irritability," which employed galvanic metaphors to describe disease as a disequilibrium of "sensation," or an upsetting of the "indifference point" between the individual organism and its environment (*FO,* 68, 123-147, 152, 159-72).

Schelling repeatedly stresses this *agon* at the heart of nature—the "original diremption in nature itself," the "universal duplicity" (*FO,* 205, 88-9, fn87, 114, 116-7)—at the center of "life," which drives the motive processes of nature continually on, "contesting" any static "individual" (*FO,* 36). Schelling's uniqueness lies in his refusal to shelter negativity or disease from nature, and life more broadly, which is itself won by way of "struggle": "Activated selfhood is necessary for the rigor of life; without [struggle] there would be sheer death, a falling asleep of the good; for, where there is no struggle, there is no life" (*FE,* 63).[279] In this way, one can see the divergent trajectories of nature—its unending struggle with itself—as the very essence of life. Such a sentiment is echoed by Habermas: "Catastrophe is ontologically normalized" ("Dialectical," 70). As will now be argued, such a troubled ground for philosophy would have severe consequences for any philosophy built on the possible transition from nature to *Spirit*, as

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[279] Describing the centrality of "struggle" to the Schellingian conception of "life," Love & Schmitt write: "Schelling's theodicy is one that sees struggle as the end of creation and the very wellspring of life. Imbalance and dissonance are of the essence and, without them, all turns into meaningless indifference, the *unground,* a rejection of the constant interestedness that is life, its tirelessly changing fusion of contraction and expansion" *(FE,* xxviii). Such a sentiment is echoed in the 1815 *Ages of the World,* wherein the "annular drive" of the absolute (or Godhead) must brought out of the "standstill" of "rotary motion," becoming actualized (as "Being") via the struggle that is existence (*AW,* 21-22, 12). Habermas echoes such sentiments: "Schelling joins Hegel in opposing those who play down the conflict in life, because life itself essentially involves conflict" ("Dialectical," 51).

Schelling is seemingly unable to definitively figure nature in terms of an upwardly organizing *Stufenfolge*. One is left with a realm of what Žižek terms, "sheer antagonism," a "traumatic core" of instability and constant deferral, a baroque horizon akin to that explored in Benjamin's *Trauerspiel*, in which nature and fate rule with a brute necessity (Žižek, *Plague,* 216; Rajan, *Romantic Narrative,* 141; cf. Habermas, "Dialectical," 55).

Relying on Schelling's own stated intentions for his project, this *Naturphilosophie,* once properly understood, and set apart from mere "natural history" (*FO,* 53; Rajan, "Immunitary," 44-45; "Margins," 320-21), would provide the "real ground" of philosophy, which would be counterposed by an "ideal" project of transcendental human freedom, thus grounding the possibility of a historical theodicy on the organic ascendency of nature (*STI,* 203, 210-1). Schelling's 1800 *System of Transcendental Idealism* presents a Fichtean model of the ideal movement of philosophy, which freely manifests "consciously" what is merely "unconscious in nature," eventually appealing to art as a site of mediation between the two sides of philosophy (*STI,* 11-12, 199, 219-36). As in the Kantian discourse of "Genius," nature manifests and comes to know itself through human creative acts, or human freedom expresses the free productivity of nature (*CPJ,* 186-196). Thus, subject and object, real and ideal, freedom and necessity, are grounded in a more primordial "Identity," from which they are severed: "The all is before the one. Necessity is before freedom" (*AW*, 44). That is, Schelling postulates the *Stufenfolge* as a regulative ideal towards which nature (and philosophy) must strive.

However, the empirical chaos and autogenetic proliferation of nature troubles any such final unity, as Schelling is unable to execute this absorption of nature into *Spirit*. In anticipation of the contradictory dynamism of his middle work, throughout the 1790s and early 1800s, the "ideal" and "real" polarities of Schelling's thinking remain locked in a struggle for domination, and as he gradually moves away from, and eventually breaks with, Fichte in 1801 (Beiser, *Idealism,* 500-5). These ideal and real principles become unmoored from any stable reconciliation in "identity philosophy," thus entering into a negative dialectical tension, which sets the stage for the antinomies presented in his 1809

*Freedom* essay and middle work.[280] Given the dynamic picture of nature already present in these early texts, one might question if nature remains an "indivisible remainder" for Schelling: too diseased, too anarchic, too productive, to be the stable ground of any ideal philosophical project (Beiser, *Idealism,* 524-7). Thus, Schelling's own "feral natality" as a thinker: he is, as Benjamin later termed it, a "new constructor" who constantly sought to "start from scratch" (*SW 2:* 732; cf. Wirth, *Wild,* 23). Or with Adorno, Schelling conceives of nature as a "non-identical" autogenetic productivity, which continually contests the stability of the epistemic subject, along with any possible arrangement of concepts and categories. Schelling's thought seeks to do justice to the contradictory vigour of nature by incorporating its diseased and contingent elements into a philosophy of *Spirit*. Nowhere is this transgressive vitality more evident than in the positivity accorded to "evil" in Schelling's 1809 *Freedom* essay*,* in which the unruly negativity of God's divided essence continually threatens any theodicy (or philosophical project).

## 5.3.2 The *Freedom* Essay (1809): Evil and Theodicy (or Negativity and System)

> "An individual body part, like an eye, is only possible within the whole of an organism; nonetheless, it has its own life for itself, indeed, its own kind of freedom, which it obviously proves through the disease of which it is capable." Schelling, *FE,* 18.

Schelling's 1809 *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom (FE)* engages in a "meta-critique" of both the "real" and "ideal" moments of his earlier thinking: seeking to articulate a dynamic conception of nature, alongside a naturalistic ground of freedom, and mediating both by way of their identity-in-difference. Responding to "the abyss"—or "incalculable chasm" (Wirth, *Wild,* 13)—opened between freedom and necessity by Kant's "third antinomy," Schelling demonstrates that such an

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[280] Describing the dynamism between "ideal" and "real" that occurs with the 1809 *Freedom* essay*,* Bowie will write that in the *Freedom* essay "and more coherently in the 1811-15 *Ages of the World*, Schelling breaks with the tendency towards a static, balanced relationship of the 'ideal' and 'real'...and becomes concerned with...the ground of which the conflicting principles which constitute the manifest world are the consequence" (*Bowie,* 13-14). McGrath describes the *Freedom Essay* as a "hinge" (following Derrida) which allows Schelling to open out from his early *Naturphilosophical* concerns into the domains of history, theology, and revelation (2). Such a reading is confirmed by Schelling's own stated intention for the work, which he intended to introduce further Ideal considerations: "The current treatise is the first in which the author puts forth his concept of the ideal part of philosophy with complete determinateness." (*FE*, 4). However, what this "complete determinateness" is, and how it could relate to its prior "real basis," deserves to be further speculated upon.

opposition is merely apparent, as both terms are shown to be united by a shared "living ground" (*FE,* 26). As Merleau-Ponty asserts, "what appears to Kant as an abyss (*Ungrund*) appears to Schelling as the definition of God" (37-8). That is, Schelling incorporates the fraught duality of nature into the very essence of the Godhead (or the absolute), and God's dark theodicy allows Schelling to think the philosophical system in an anxious and negative direction. What emerges forcefully in the *Freedom* essay is Schelling's "tragic" notion of the absolute, one which doubts the possibility of the philosophical system as a means to realize freedom (Krell, *Tragic,* 72-3). Schelling gives "freedom" a transgressive autonomy with his positive definition of it as a capacity to "do evil," and his further refusal to sever evil from God's essence; instead, evil is given a positive and material force, becoming a vital moment in the "ground of being" (*FE,* 32-9).[281] Habermas describes evil as a form of autonomous negativity: "evil arises out of the self-willed sovereignty of a 'barbarian principle' which conquered but not annulled, is the true foundation of everything great" ("Dialectical," 56, 55). What is staged in the *Freedom* essay—an "essay" in the Adornian sense (1.2 & 1.4.1)—is Schelling's emergent negative dialectic: not only between "ideal" and "real," or "freedom" and "necessity," which are mediated in difference without synthesis, but more fundamentally between the philosophical system and its possible "diseased" transgressions. What is prefaced in the *FE* and continued in the *Ages* is the possibility of an "unbounded negativity" (to follow Bataille), an un-recoverable model of negativity which threatens the restricted economy of philosophy, untethering negativity from its position of subservience, and forcing philosophy to consider alternative repressed and phantasmatic logics.[282] In the *FE,* though Schelling gazes into the ruinous-generative abyss that is nature—via his dynamic understanding of "evil"—he ultimately puts this negativity back to "work," employing it in the services of theodicy, or the positive unfolding of philosophy.

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[281] Love & Schmidt describe the deficiencies of the Kantian and Leibnizian theodical conception of "evil," as a form of lack or deficiency (x-xix). This positivity of evil can also be thought in terms of Bataille's notion of transgression, see "The Notion of Expenditure" (116-130).

[282] Differentiating Schellingian unbounded negativity from Hegelian negation—in which negativity is sublated into the universality of the concept—Habermas writes: "the negative [in Schelling] gains the substantial character of a contraction that is both less destructible and more forgiving than [Hegel's] diremption of life into the abstract universal and isolated individual" ("Dialectical," 63).

Such a (negative) dialectical mediation without *Aufhebung*, or conceptual resolution, becomes possible by way of Schelling's revised notion of the copula "is," which he deconstructs in relation to vulgar understandings of pantheism. Pantheism, broadly understood, refers to the belief in the immanence of God in all things, such that God loses his transcendent status. Schelling commences his *FE* by estranging the reader from conventional understandings of pantheism, allowing for new potential relations between God and nature, while shattering the equation of pantheism with atheistic fatalism, or utter necessity (*FE,* 11-16). Such vulgar conceptions rest upon a "general misunderstanding of the meaning of the copula in judgment" (*FE,* 13).[283] Specifically, in the context of the pantheist equation that says God "is" all things, or freedom=necessity (and perhaps ideal=real), the copula should not be understood to express an identity between the two terms "through and through," but instead, should be understood "dialectically," such that subject and predicate are set in opposition and then mediated by way of their difference, with the subject expressing a stable identity that persists through the modifications of predication. Or as Schelling puts it, "subject and predicate are set against each other as what is enfolded to what is unfolded (*implicitum et explicitum*)" (*FE,* 13-14). One could say that freedom expresses itself by way of its opposition to necessity, or one comes to understand the value of freedom only by way of working through necessity (physically or intellectually).

Though originally couched in relation to the vexing "Pantheism controversy,"[284] Schelling's revision of the copula provides a powerful armature through which to rethink

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[283] Describing his revised notion of the copula in relation to the proposition, "The body is blue," Schelling will write, "The body is blue, does not mean the body is blue 'through and through'" rather "only the meaning that the same thing which is a body is also blue, although not in the same respect" (*FE,* 13), he goes on to elaborate a new form of relation by which difference persists even in tautology, "[in] which subject and predicate are set against each other as what is enfolded to what is unfolded" (*FE,* 14). Describing his new speculative understanding of the copula, Schelling asserts, "Whoever says 'the body is body' [or is blue], surely thinks something different with respect to the subject of the sentence than with respect to the predicate; with respect to the former namely, unity, with respect to the latter, the individual properties contained within the concept of body that relation to it as *antecedens* to *consequens*" (*FE,* 14).

[284] The immediate occasion Schelling's reflections was the "Pantheism controversy" surrounding Spinoza's work (and its reception), which captivated much of the post-Kantian generation. For a detailed gloss on the Pantheism controversy between Jacobi and Mendelsohn, see Beiser, *The Fate of Reason* (44-108). Within the dispute, Spinoza serves as a cipher for many social, political, and religious trajectories of the early enlightenment, such as the limits (and consequences) of rational inquiry (or the limits of skepticism), the role of faith in enlightenment, and the possibility of a rational natural religion.

theodicy—or the philosophical system—in relation to a substantial account of evil, or negativity. One of Schelling's key aims throughout the *Freedom* essay, along with his later *Weltalter* Project (1811-15), is to attempt to think a revised conception of theodicy which gives full weight to the existence of evil, or the negative, within the philosophical system. Theodicy, which was given its modern cast by Leibniz, saw God's providence manifesting itself throughout nature and history, with all evil, death, and negativity being eventually contained within the final revelation of the "best of all possible worlds" (*FE,* 36). Stated in the terms of Goethe's Mephistopheles, evil (or the negative) may exist, "provided it work for good" (*Faust,* 1334-1340). Modulations on theodicy should be seen as one of the key motifs of German Idealism, reaching their apex in Hegel, who sought to create a secular and natural theodicy of reason, which, to quote Bataille, is one in which "man has taken the place of God" ("Hegel," 281), completing the revelation of reason by ascending to absolute knowledge.[285] Moving in the opposite direction, Schelling develops a naturalized conception of the absolute in which "God is a life, not a being" (*FE,* 66).

Within the *Freedom* essay, Schelling examines the extent to which God's providential omniscience and benevolence are contradicted by the existence of evil, or, the degree to which negativity threatens the philosophical system. How could a benevolent and all-knowing God allow the existence of evil? Schelling sidesteps the force of this dilemma by splitting the Godhead into "being in so far as it exists and being in so far as it is the ground of existence," with evil residing in the "ground of existence" (or "nature"), and God's benevolence in "being as it exists" (*FE,* 27). With such thought experiments regarding God's splitting of himself, Schelling moves to think the problem of "beginning," or the emergence of the "productivity" of both nature and freedom from primordial nothingness, a project continued in his *Weltalter* project (Žižek, *Indivisible,* 14). Following Boehme, Schelling seeks God's originary act of creation, "the birth of

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[285] Glossing the providential nature of Hegel's thinking in contradistinction to the negativity of Schelling, Wirth will write: "Hegel's spirit always lives to tell of its encounter with alterity and profits anew from it. It will not die of its own antinomies" (2003, 164). Echoing these sentiments apropos of evil, Žižek will write: "This surplus which eludes notional self-mediation can be discerned exemplary apropos of the problematic of Evil: Hegel reduces Evil to the subordinated moment in the self-mediation of the Idea *qua* supreme Good, whereas in Schelling Evil remains a permanent possibility which can never be fully 'sublated' (*Aufgehoben*)" (Žižek, *Indivisible,* 6).

darkness into light," the "yearning of the eternal ground to give birth to itself," or God's splitting of himself such that the reign of providence may begin (*FE,* 29; Wirth, *Conspiracy,* 189-90).[286] God, as benevolent and omniscient, must have the ground of his existence in himself, but this ground is not God "considered absolutely," but rather, "as nature," encompassing "everything that lies beyond the Absolute Being of absolute identity" (*FE,* 28). As always already ontologically differing from himself, God transposes his inherent duality into both nature and the human. The origin of reality lies in this splitting of God with himself into ideal and real, being and ground, and such a contradiction in the Godhead comes to manifest itself over all reality as its dark precursor. Describing the persistence of such a tensioned duality, Schelling will write:

> After the eternal act of self-revelation, everything in the world is, as we see it now, rule, order and form; but anarchy still lies in the ground, as if it could break through once again, and nowhere does it appear as if order and form where what is original but rather as if initial anarchy had been brought to order. This is the incomprehensible base of reality in things, the indivisible remainder, that which with the greatest *excertio* cannot be resolved in understanding but remains eternally in the ground. The understanding is born in the genuine sense from that which is without understanding. Without this preceding darkness creatures have no reality; darkness is their necessary inheritance. (*FE,* 29)

Despite attempts to contain the "anarchy" or restless negativity at the ground of all things, it persists, continually threatening to break through and ruin any stable notion of theodicy or the philosophical system. Nature as ground remains an "indivisible remainder," which constantly endeavours to transgress the whole. Thus Schelling's formulation of the "*Ungrund,*" a ground that precedes all grounding, or a recognition of the abyss or groundlessness of all grounding: "**there must be a being *before* all ground and before all that exists, thus generally before any duality—how can we call it anything other than the original ground or the *non-ground* (*Ungrund*)... the absolute *indifference* of both...indifference is its own being, separate from all opposition, a being against which all opposites ruin themselves" (*FE,* 68-70). Such an *un-groundedness* "continues to remain active in evil as health continues to be active in disease," relentlessly threatening

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[286] Describing the necessity of God's division with himself, Schelling will write: "But God himself requires a ground so that he can exists; but only a ground that is not outside but inside him, and has in itself a *nature* which, although belonging to him, is yet different from him...for the ground must be active so that love may exist." (*FE,* 42).

to overrun any stable philosophical reconciliation (*FE,* 66). As with Adorno's doublet of "natural history," Schelling's notion of the "*Ungrund*" provides a transient –volatile starting point for thought: an "abyss of freedom," out of which philosophy begins (Žižek, "Abyss," 3-7, 14-21).

Despite the un-grounding of metaphysics in the middle of the text, because of the final segment which prophecies the birth of light from darkness, one can legitimately question the extent to which Schelling shies away from the dynamism of his understanding of evil, sacrificing the full force of his notion of freedom to a conventional notion of theodicy that culminates in God's revelation-manifestation as "Love" (*FE,* 72). For all its energy, anarchy, and groundlessness, evil seemingly still brings forth, and negatively accentuates, the manifestation of God's love and providence.[287] Despite this onto-theological closure, one can question if the heart of the text does not lie earlier, especially given that Schelling accords far more space to speculations on pantheism (*FE,* 11-26) and the *Ungrund* (*FE,* 26-66) than the theodicy of God's love (*FE,* 70-77). Schelling's transition to theodicy comes by way of a "decision" (*Entschluß*): a repression of, or a radical break with, the past (in nature) in order to move upward to theodical closure (*AW (1813),* 168-9).[288] As Žižek has pointed out, whatever absolute is arrived at with the *FE's* closure is still shot through with the "contingency of necessity" (*Indivisible,* 45, 15): the productive ground remains eternally active, threatening to override the system which tries to contain it. Any "ideal" philosophical system will remain threatened by its anarchic "real" ground. Schelling himself seems to welcome these sorts of transgressions, or moments in which the negative (that is, evil, death, or disease) breaks free and gains a certain autonomy.

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[287] Ultimately, Schelling seems to favour a notion of freedom in accord with divine providence: "True freedom is in harmony with holy necessity, the likes of which we perceive in essential cognition, when spirit and heavy, bound only by their own law, freely affirm what is necessary" (*FE,* 56). Wirth also describes "Love" as "highest point of the whole investigation" (*Conspiracy of Life,* 186). Though Schelling onto-theologically closes the text in the service of revelation, the *FE* essay can be read against the grain, as a resistant and anarchic text, which provides the negative (or "evil") resources to transgress any possible system of thought.

[288] Schelling describes such a "decision" with respect to nature as conditioning the emergence of history: "We thus see everything ready for a decision; and for the eternal, this last stage in which it becomes aware of itself marks the boundary between the past state and one to follow" (*AW* [1813], 167).

Describing the autonomy of an individual member within an organic whole, Schelling writes: "The same is valid for the containment of one thing within another. An individual body part, like an eye, is only possible within the whole of an organism; nonetheless, it has its own life for itself, indeed, its own kind of freedom, which it obviously proves through the disease of which it is capable" (*FE,* 18; cf. *AW,* 67). In considering freedom as the capacity for evil, Schelling appears to invite such violent and diseased transgressions of his system, and as such beckons one to consider the philosophical system (and its relation to negativity) in more radical ways than are allowed for by the steadiness of Hegel's labour of the negative. Writing in the delayed aftermath of the Revolution and Terror, Schelling provides substantial resources to think philosophy (as a systemic enterprise) after the immense historical dissonance and evil of the twentieth-century, anticipating projects such as Adorno's.[289] In this way, regardless of the text's apparent onto-theological closure—which, textually speaking, has a performative, optative, and hypothetical quality— Schelling should be seen as a thinker who gives the resources to think both a revised notion of the philosophical system (or theodicy), along with its possible transgression through the dynamic space Schelling accords to the existence of evil. Ultimately, within the text, Schelling is unable to resolve this tension between evil and theodicy, constituting philosophy atop an "abyss of freedom", an *Ungrund* of negativity that could potentially overturn any fixed system.

It is also worth emphasising that in turning to "the ideal portion of philosophy" (*FE,* 4) in a proto-existentialist manner, Schelling now gives a privileged position to human freedom as an explication of what is merely implicit in nature's productivity. As the highest "potency" of nature, humans unfold and continue the destiny of nature, participating in its "original duality," via the ethical choice between good and evil: "Only in man, therefore, is the word fully proclaimed which in all other things is held back and incomplete...The same unity that is in-severable in God must therefore be severable in man—and this is the possibility of good and evil" (*FE,* 33).  The human is constituted by the same "abyss of freedom," the anarchy of the ground, over which any sovereign

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[289] Comay has glossed Hegel as a thinker of the French Revolution (*Mourning,* 1-8), which can be extended to describe Schelling's thought as well, which is more obliquely related to political historical events (see Habermas, "Dialectical," 43-7).

decision is conducted, which allows one to transgress the absolute absolutely: "Through this act the life of man reaches to the beginning of creation; hence through it man is outside the created, being free and eternal beginning itself" (*FE,* 51, 46; Žižek, *Indivisible,* 63-7; Krell, *Tragic,* 107-108). The human faces the same void of sovereignty which God confronted at the origin of creation, hence is free by way a capacity to do evil and thus has the potential to constitute a theodicy (or system), or to transgress such edifices absolutely. This productive defiance subtending both the human and natural world—what Wirth has termed "the conspiracy of life"—should lead, as in Bataille, to the expenditure, or "liquification" of the "the great clot that is the ego" a final free act of self-destruction, an absolute alliance of freedom with necessity (Wirth, "Conspiracy," 186, 73; Bataille, "Expenditure," 116-123, 128-9). Echoing such "acephalic" sentiments, Habermas asserts, "absolute control over everything" can only be "completed by removing the domination" via the "production of another absolute...in the union with something that is utterly uncontrollable" ("Dialectical, 60).

Much remains to be said regarding this speculative affinity of Schelling with Bataille: both are thinkers of disease and transgression, who repeatedly strive to derange the constitutive stability of philosophy by way of its repressed phantasms (Bataille, "Sacrifices," 130-6; "Hegel," 286-92). As in Benjamin's Baroque, freedom comes not through some subjective act of sovereignty, but rather, through the melancholic affirmation of transience, a recognition of "the veil of dejection that is spread over all nature, the deep indestructible melancholy of all life. Joy must have suffering, suffering must be transfigured in joy" (*FE,* 63; cf. Habermas, "Dialectical," 50). This suffering negativity at the heart of life has the potential to deeply unbind and trouble the philosophical system, as it does in in Schelling's *Weltalter* project, to which I will now turn.

### 5.3.3 Soliciting Divine Madness: Schelling's Negative Dialectic (*The Ages of the World,* 1815)

"All life must pass through the fire of contradiction. Contradiction is the power mechanism and what is innermost of life. From this it follows that, as an old book says, all deeds under the sun are full of trouble and everything languishes in toil, yet does not become tired, and all forces incessantly struggle against each other. Were there only unity and everything were in peace, then, forsooth, nothing would want to stir itself and everything would sink to listlessness. Now, however, everything ardently strives to get out of unrest and attain rest." Schelling, *Ages of the World,* 90.

The tensions within Schelling's *Freedom* essay remain bounded within the economy of theodicy. However, throughout his 1811-1815 *Weltalter* project [*Ages of the World*], the negative, or diseased kernel of Schelling's thought—the duplicity or "inner self-laceration of nature, that wheel of initial birth spinning about itself as if mad" (*AW*, 103)—becomes increasingly unbound from any stable containment within the philosophical system. Thus, it is within the 1815 version of the *Weltalter* that Schelling emerges forcefully as a thinker of the negative dialectic, one for whom the identity and stability of the philosophical system is called into question by the forces of contradiction and negativity: "Everything, even the most precious being, must perish in collision with nature" (Habermas, "Dialectical," 66).[290] As such, Schelling's middle thought does not culminate in some stable transition from nature to spirit, but rather, in an affirmation of the "divine madness" or "original diremption" at the heart of the Godhead and nature. Schelling moves away from the "economy of plenitude" of his early philosophy of nature, into a natural historical philosophy of "crisis" or "psychosis" (Rajan, "Margins," 334; Žižek, *Indivisible,* 31).[291] God's self-abdication—which can be thought in terms of Bataille's self-sacrifice—stages the fatal power Schelling bestows on negativity, or the phantasm, such that alterity overruns the stability of thought: "God's omnipotence is complete only when he lets something like himself come into existence, something to which...God can also lose his own power: with him, the first man, God puts his own fate in jeopardy" (Habermas, "Dialectical," 57).[292] Within this text, Schelling confronts the

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[290] Žižek has argued that Schelling's *Weltalter* should be seen as "one of the seminal works of materialism" (7), given the negative dialectical fracturing of Idealism his work undertakes (6). Put otherwise, Schelling stages the auto-deconstruction, or self-critique without synthesis, latent in German Idealism. Thus, Schelling's work is at once "within the universe of speculative Idealism," and "already encroach into the post-Hegelian universe of finitude-contingency-temporality" (*Indivisible,* 7). Žižek goes further, asserting that Schelling hypostasizes negative dialectical tension into the essence of reality: "what we experience as 'reality' is constituted and maintains itself through the proper balance and tensions between two antagonistic forces, with the ever-present danger that one of the two sides will 'be cracked,' run out of control and thus destroy the 'impression of reality'" (*Indivisible,* 24).

[291] Describing the pathological nature of "beginning" (or the transition from nature to sprit) in Schelling's *WA,* Rajan writes: "Spirit cannot begin, because it cannot break out of the rotation between expansive and contractive drives that binds it into its psychoanalysis. It begins, nevertheless, by transferring this psychosis into history as the psychogenesis...of the absolute" ("Natural History ," 195).

[292] In a Bataillesque manner Habermas will write: "Absolute control over everything, even over this absoluteness itself, is completed by removing the domination that is made possible by the production of another absolute and thus in the union with something that is utterly uncontrollable...For the sake of love,

history of nature as a primal scene of trauma and ruin, an "indivisible remainder," or ur-negativity that cannot be recouped by philosophy.

Broadly speaking, Schelling's *Weltalter* project can be seen as continuing the speculative theodicy of his *Freedom* essay*,* endeavouring to think the problem of "beginning": God's original decision of creation, along with his continual emanation through the various "ages" of creation (*AW,* 37, 51, 80; Žižek, *Indivisible,* 14; Krell, *Tragic,* 107, 149). Each age still contains within itself remnants of "the universal magic that permeates all things," as a vital ground which continues to act and create, manifesting as nature and human history (*AW,* 64-65, 75-78, 90-1). The text stages the "crisis of the science of reason" as the various "ages of the world" "put god at the mercy of history" (Habermas, "Dialectical," 76). In this manner, the 1815 *AW* should be read as a document of "natural history" in Adorno's and Benjamin's sense (Rajan, "Abyss," 2; "Margins," 320-1), that is, the text's fraught abstractions should be seen as allegorizing the pathological and autogenetic forces latent in both natural and historical processes. Of the three currently published versions of the text,[293] the third, 1815 version is the most discordant and negative: with its Dionysian descriptions of the "Bacchic...divine madness" at the origin of creation (*WA,* 103), through to the "orgasm of forces" (*WA,* 101), unleashed by the "original negation" of God's originary act (*WA,* 30).

Seen in constellation with his *Freedom* essay*,* the 1815 *Ages of the World* provides valuable resources to think the philosophical system differently, presenting models of continual negative dialectical tension without resolution in which "the antithesis can as little surrender to unity as unity can surrender to antithesis" (*AW,* 10, 19, 16). That is, philosophy is thought in a natural-historical sense, as being allegorically

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God must take on the risk that his counterpart might refuse him—and dissolve the unity of principles that was indissoluble in God himself." ("Dialectical," 60; see further, Bataille, "Expenditure," 116-123, 128-9).
[293] Much remains to be said regarding the complex intertextual relationship between the three (currently) published versions of the text, as many passages are redeployed within the economy of each "version" such that they resound in fundamentally differing ways. This is particularly evident with respect to "negativity," which, though it occurs in both the 1811 (68, 112) and 1813 version (175-82), is put to work, serving the manifestation of divine providence and the theodicy of the philosophical system (160-1). By contrast, the 1815 version of the text culminates in the orgiastic description of the "divine madness" of the Godhead at the origin of creation (*AW,* 102-3), though a similar passage occurs in the 1811 version (101-2), this dissonance becomes merely a negative moment in a broader positive unfolding of God's theodicy. For more on the various editions of the *WA,* and the specific negativity of the 1815 version, see Rajan, "Margins" (321-6).

subservient to the same transience in nature it describes: thought must put itself at risk. Throughout the text, Schelling makes several meta-critical comments on philosophy, deriding the "so-called enlightenment," which has lost its feeling for substance and for the "barbarian principle" at the heart of "life" (*AW*, 106).[294]  Modern philosophy, with its lack of a "living ground," emerged only "yesterday" (*AW*, 50; *FE*, 26); that is, it remains either one-sidedly "realist" (Spinoza) or "Idealist" (Leibniz), and thus was unable to grasp the "universal magic that permeates all things" (*AW*, 65). Spinoza and Leibniz should be seen as dialogical characters through whom Schelling works out his own philosophical views. Spinoza, despite his "dark feeling of that primordial time," remains a one-sided realist, bound by a mechanistic-geometrical world view, "hence the lack of life and progression in his system" (*AW*, 104; *FE*, 59-62; *Ideas*, 16, 27). Leibniz is chastised as a similarly "one-sided" "Idealist," whose doctrine consists in the "denial and non-acknowledgement of that negating primordial force," the dynamic ground of nature (*AW*, 7). Schelling describes the "main weakness of all modern philosophy," as its "lack of an intermediate concept"; thus "everything that is not spiritual in the highest sense is material in the crudest sense" (*AW*, 64; *US*, 7, 16). Schelling does not aim for some conciliatory concept (or idea) that would eradicate the difference between terms, but rather a mode of thought—following Schelling's vision of the copula" (*FE*, 13-14)—that recognizes the identity in opposition between the ideal and real moments of philosophy.[295]

In this section I will position Schelling's agonistic theodicy as providing the resources to think the system and its "diseased" transgression simultaneously, a tension which is bound together through the model of "organism" inherited from Kant, though refashioned towards Schelling's own doctrine of "potencies" (*AW*, 19, 55-9, 82-4). Schelling's draft-like essayistic thinking refuses any definitive closure, staging a speculative auto-deconstruction of Idealism, whereby its notions (of identity, dialectic, and system) are wrecked through an exposure to the "living ground" of thought. As such,

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[294] As I have argued, both Benjamin and Adorno are similarly critical of the limited epistemological mythology of the enlightenment.

[295] Such a "negative dialectical" motif is evident throughout Schelling's *AW*, particularly particularity in the tensions of "the third potency" ($A^3$)" which cannot occupy the position of "synthesis" (see *AW*, 19, 36).

Schelling's thought provides the means to think nature, along with any supposed philosophy of spirit, in a dark and negative direction, articulating a fractured model of Idealism which prioritizes parataxis and dissonance over unity. Specifically, in the *Weltalter,* Schelling presents an absconded and pathological absolute, mirroring that articulated in Benjamin's early writings, specifically his *Trauerspiel.* Schelling's proto-psychoanalytic figurations (Rajan, "Abyss," 1-3) develop a negative dialectical model of thinking, through which the "originary diremption" inherent in both the Godhead and nature continually contests the stability of the enlightenment project—or any possible system of philosophy. That is, instead of enlightenment providential narratives of the progressive unfolding of freedom, one confronts the transient abyss of natural history, tarrying with the fact that "all evolution presupposed involution" (*WA,* 83). Schelling's text figures a psychoanalytic "working through" of the traumas of the past (of the various "ages" of the world), leading thought to the *ur-trauma,* or the "original duality" at the origin of creation, and in the heart of the absolute.

Schelling's 1815 text recapitulates the *Freedom* essay's problems of beginning (of moving beyond "the abyss of freedom" to history), evoking a parallelism between the *Ungrund* against which God's sovereign "decision" at the origin of creation is conducted, and that which subtends the human "decision" between good and evil:

> Man is in the initial creation, as shown, an undecided being...only man himself can decide. But this decision cannot occur within time; it occurs outside of all time and, hence, together with the first creation (though as a deed distinct from creation). Man, even if born in time, is indeed created into the beginning of creation (the centrum). The act, whereby his life is determined in time, does not itself belong to time but rather to eternity: it also does not temporally precede life but goes through time...as an act which is eternal by nature. (*FE,* 51)

In a similar manner, Schelling opens the *AW* by speculatively placing "man" atop the same abyss confronted by the Godhead: "Certainly one who could write completely the history of their own life would have, in a small epitome, concurrently grasped the history of the cosmos" (*WA,* 3, 20, 102; *WA* [*1813*], 178). The psychoanalytic valences of such an onto- and cosmo-genetic parallelism are highly evident, and Freud evokes a similar analogy between the individual consciousness and the macro-drives which manifest as the destructive pathologies or "discontent" of civilization (*Civilization,* 17-21, 38-52). Or with Bataille, "the ebullition I consider, which animates the globe, is also *my* ebullition"

(*Accursed,* 10). Rajan has aptly charted the psychoanalytic motif throughout Schelling's text: from his explicit figuration of "the unconscious"— "all consciousness is grounded on the unconscious and precisely in the dawning of consciousness the unconscious is posited as the past of consciousness... there is no consciousness without something that is at the same time excluded and contracted" (*AW,* 44- 45)— to his depiction of the primal drives subtending divine nature and the human (*AW,* 68-9, 98, 100, 102-3; Rajan, "Abyss," 1-2; "Psychoanalysis,"1-10).[296] Yet in Schelling's proto-psychoanalytic vision one is not led to some palliative equilibrium of primal forces (via some triangulated Oedipal scene), but rather, thought is led to probe the depths of "nature... an abyss of the past," the "traumatic core of spirit" (*AW,* 31; Rajan, "Abyss," 1).  Schelling chastises the "Idealism" of his day as a naïve doctrine which "consists in the denial and non-acknowledgement of that negating primordial force" (*AW,* 7),[297] a system which idealizes human action, shying away from disease, death, and "the abysses of the human heart"— the material forces of evil latent in the *Ungrund* of nature (*AW,* 48).[298] Thus, Schelling

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[296] Rajan's "The Abyss of the Past" provides an excellent entry point for interrogating Schelling's *Weltalter* in relation to psychoanalysis. Specifically, in his discussion of mesmerism and "magnetic sleep" (*AW,* 68-9), Schelling anticipates many elements of the psychoanalytic process (Rajan, "Abyss," 7-8): "All the force of the person during the waking state are apparently governed by a unity that holds them together...but if this link is dissolved, then each force retreats back into itself and each tool now seems to be active for itself and in its own world" (*AW,* 68).  Further, with passages such as, "this intellect is an intermediary between the utter night of consciousness and levelheaded spirit" (*AW,* 102) and "the past state is not comprehensible from the present state. Rather, the past state lies at the basis of the present state" (*AW,* 100), Schelling anticipates psychoanalysis' fracturing of consciousness by way of its constitutive "unconscious" processes." Habermas further draws attention to the parallelism between cosmogenesis and transcendental thought (see "Dialectical," 71).

[297] Echoing this critique of Idealism's repression of its dark ground, or negativity, Schelling writes, "Indeed, humans show a natural predilection for the affirmative just as much as they turn away from the negative...Most people would find nothing more natural than if everything in the world were to consist of pure gentleness and goodness, at which point they would become aware of their opposite. Something inhibiting, something conflicting, imposes itself everywhere: this Other is that which, so to speak, should not be and yet is, nay must be. It is this No that resists the Yes, this darkening which resists the light, this obliquity that resists the straight, this left that resists the right, and however else one has attempted to express this eternal antithesis in images." (*AW,* 6). For Schelling, one must linger and tarry with the negativity at the heart of being, "Whoever wants knowledge of history must accompany it along its great path, linger over each moment, and surrender to the gradualness of the development. The darkness of the spirit cannot be overcome suddenly or in one fell swoop. The world is not a riddle whose solution could be given in a single world" (*AW,* 4).

[298] In a similar manner, Adorno is critical of mere enlightenment for forgetting this naturalistic basis. Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944/7) describes the "disenchanting" character of western reason: enlightenment seeks to dominate its "other"—nature, mythology, and all particularity—by way of determinate categories, thus turning the natural world into what Heidegger termed a "standing reserve"—a natural world deprived of autogenetic and telic capacities ("Technology" 324-326, 329*; DE,*

positions philosophy as a base material "counter science" which continually contests ideal philosophical doctrines by leading them back to the "auto-castration" at the heart of nature (*AW,* 103).

Such a "traumatic core" of spirit is none other than the "divine and holy madness" (*AW,* 102), the "original negation" of God in creation which "is still the mother and the wet-nurse of the entire world that is visible to us" (*AW,* 30, 15-16). As Žižek has pointed out, this negation, or withdrawal at the origin of creation transfers a fundamental "gap" into the constitution of reality, the Lacanian "trauma of the Real"—of "sheer antagonism"—that can never be fully recuperated by thought (*Indivisible,* 24; *Plague,* 216). As in Benjamin's refashioning of "origin" (*OT,* 24-26), which articulates a transient natural-historical starting point for philosophy, "origin," or "beginning," comes to be thought in a historically reiterable sense.[299]

God's "beginning" does not occur "once upon a time," but rather, "it persists," as an originary act still dormant in all creation. As Schelling writes: "the primordial deed becomes a beginning that can never be sublimated" (*AW,* 85; 63, 96, 98), and further, "a true beginning is not one that constantly begins again, but persists" (*AW,* 20-21). This beginning, which transfers God's fraught duality into the world, allows for history, and more radically, for "historical materialism" and "psychoanalysis," modes of thought which un-work the positivity of knowledge, putting both God and the stability of thought into question (Habermas, "Dialectical," 75-85; Rajan, "Margins," 325). As in Benjamin's Baroque, nature languishes in suffering due to its transient character, as God's original suffering is imparted universally to creation:

> Suffering is universal, not only with respect to humanity, but also with respect to the creator. God leads human nature down no other path that that down which God himself must pass. Participating in everything blind, dark, and suffering of God's nature is necessary in order to elevate God to the highest consciousness. Every

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xvii, 6, 11). Adorno and Horkheimer employ Idealist and psychoanalytic motifs in a meta-critical confrontation of enlightenment with its own pathologies: reason is forced to tarry with its disregarded "phantasms," specifically, "nature," that abject other repressed by enlightenment narratives of progress (1-3; 6-8; 10; 18-22).

[299] Krell (in *The Tragic Absolute*) sees Schelling's text as presenting a strife ridden model of Idealism, in which thought is unable to reach its own "origin," thus remaining constitutively fractured, a "tragic" model of Idealism (183). For Krell, the problem of the text "whole and entire" entails the questioning, "How one can give an account of what one has never seen" (149), or as Schelling put it, "what kept God busy before God created the world?" (*AW,* 80).

single being must get to know their own depths and this is only possible with suffering. All pain comes only from Being. (*AW,* 101)[300]

One is immediately reminded of the *Freedom* essay'*s* splitting of the Godhead into "ground" (or nature, the *Ungrund*) and "being," though in the later *Weltalter,* the manifestation of "Love" is not enough to quell the primordial fire of negativity emanating from the ground. That is, nature—or the ground of being—with its destructive parturition constantly threatens the possibility of theodicy: "in God, there would be no life and no joy of life were the now subordinated forces not in constant possibility of fanning the flames of the contradiction against unity" (*AW,* 47, 32-33, 50, 100-1). God also has an unconscious: a dark ground in nature that contains self-destructive "drives," which relentlessly threatens the stability of his own benevolent theodicy. Schelling's *Weltalter* stages God's confrontation with his own divided essence, a *Trauerspiel* in which God has "become a life not a being" and comes to realize that "without the contradiction, there would be no movement, no life, and no progress. There would only be eternal stoppage, a deathly slumber of the forces" (*FE,* 66*; AW,* 12, 70).

Returning to Schelling's proto-psychoanalytic vision, one could see his discourse as harnessing the same "self-lacerating" "rotary dialectic" it posits in nature: "The ancients did not speak in vain of a divine and holy madness. We even see nature, in the process of its free unfolding, becoming, in proportion to its approaching spirit, even more, so to speak, frenzied.... all things in nature are found in an insensate state" (*AW,* 102). What is figured in the *AW* is not some straightforward coming to consciousness of unconscious pathologies by way of reason, a palliative that would allow for a transition

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[300] Continuing this motif of struggle, Schelling describes how the suffering of the Godhead is imparted to all creation in the form of "anxiety": "It is futile to attempt to explain the diversity in nature by the peaceful eisamplasy of various forces. Everything that becomes can only become in discontent. And just as anxiety is the fundamental sensation of every living creature, so, too, everything that lives is only conceived and born in violent struggle.... are not most of the products of inorganic nature manifestly the children of anxiety, or terror, nay, of despair? And so we also see in the individual cases in which we, to some extent, are permitted to be witness of an original creation, that the first foundation of future humans is only formed in deadly struggle, terrifying discontent, and anxiety that often extends in despair. If this happens in individuals and in the small, could it be any different in the large, in the creation of the first parts of the world system?" (*AW,* 91-92). Schelling imparts a similar tension to the philosophical system in his "On the Nature of Philosophy as Science," with his notion of "asystasy," the "inner conflict" which generates "knowledge" (210-12).

from nature to spirit, but rather, a continual solicitation and affirmation of the phantasmagorical ground, a favouring of disease and transgression, over and against the unity of system. Schelling ends the text in a proto-Nietzschean fashion, affirming the Dionysian madness endemic to any authentic act of creation: "nothing great can be accomplished without a constant solicitation of madness, which should always be overcome, but never be utterly lacking...where there is no madness, there is also no proper, active, living intellect" (*AW,* 103). Schelling's naturalistic ground of philosophy necessitates an organic understanding of thought in which negativity (or "disease") continually threatens the autarky of reason: "If an organic being becomes sick, forces appear that previously lay concealed in it. Or if in the copula the unity dissolves altogether if the life forces that were previously subjugated to something higher are deserted by the ruin of spirit and can freely follow their own inclinations...then something terrible becomes manifest...which was held down by the magic of life" (*AW,* 48).

As a negative dialectical thinker, Schelling is immensely skeptical of any straightforward transition from nature to *Spirit*. In fact, he describes the destructive character of history as a pathological eruption of the same forces dormant in nature which can never be "worked through":

> If we take into consideration the many terrible things in nature and the spiritual world and the great many things that a benevolent hand seems to cover up from us, then there could be no doubt that the godhead sits enthroned over a world of terrors. And God, in accordance with what is concealed in and by God, could be called the awful and the terrible, not in a derivative fashion, but in their original sense...the Forces of that consuming fire still slumber in life, only pacified and, so to speak, exorcised by that *word* by which the one became the all. If one could remove that reconciling potency, life would immediately again fall prey to that life of contradiction and consuming desire. But nature...catches itself and overcomes its own necessity by way of the forces from above, abandoning itself voluntarily to the scission and thereby to the eternal pleasure and joy of life of the Godhead. (*WA,* 49)

Indeed, Schelling presents "A Baroque worldview, exaggerated to the point of absurdity" (Habermas, "Dialectical, 55). Schelling's middle work fails to provide any stable changeover from nature to *Spirit*, nor does it provide any generalizable understanding of the philosophical system. Schelling provides a counter-providential and negative dialectical relationship between the domains of nature and *Spirit*, holding the ideal and

real moments of thought together in strife ridden identity-in-difference.[301] In a quasi Benjamian fashion, Schelling describes nature as longing to be "redeemed" from its "mute and inactive unity" (*AW,* 72), towards the "acting unity" of freedom (*AW,* 46-7, 31). However, Schelling equally demonstrates a theurgy of spirit, whereby ideals are made to descend into the maelstrom constituted by the processes of nature, becoming exposed to the dark ground of spirit by way of the contradictions inherent in the Godhead. Schelling's middle work thus exemplifies a mode of "theory" in which "even as nature is thus re-described as spirit, spirit is exposed to nature" (Rajan, "Margins," 319). Hence the difficulty of thinking a positive philosophy with Schelling: one is not led up the great chain of being to some stable thought of *Spirit*—to a conciliatory and grounded normative space. Instead, one is beckoned downward, into the "trauma of creation" (Krell, *Tragic,* 148, 183), to the dark forces of the *Ungrund,* and the "original diremption of nature *itself*" (*FO,* 205). With Schelling, what is presented is a continual exposure of reason to its own phantasms, a model of Idealism which is constantly opened and troubled via contact with the "living ground" of nature. Such a space allows Idealism to be conceived of as continually active and dynamic, sanctioning new possible constellations between nature and history, freedom, and necessity, and ideal and real.

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[301] Statements such as "Natural life [is] the echelon towards spiritual life," and "the same creative forces that lie in nature are in the being of the spiritual world" (*AW,* 64), demonstrate the reciprocal articulation of nature and *Spirit*. Schelling also speaks of a desire, or need, for nature to be liberated from its own "muteness" (*AW,* 32-4): "Left to itself, nature would still lead everything back into that state of utter negation" (*AW,* 31). This sentiment is further reinforced by Schelling's repeated reference to Romans 8: "For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time" (*NIV,* 1758). Despite this parallelism, *Spirit* (or the Godhead) is continually drawn to nature, in order to understand "the contradiction," or negativity of its own essence, the yearning for being to understand its ground (*AW,* 32-3).

# 6      *Hegel as a Ruin: Avenues of "Phantasmatological" Inquiry (Aesthetics, Nature)*

"It [vulgar intellectual history] makes the impudent claim that because one has the dubious good fortune to live later, and because one has a professional interest in the person one is to talk about, one can sovereignly assign the dead person his place, thereby in some sense elevating oneself above him. This arrogance echoes in the loathsome question of what in Kant, and now Hegel as well, has any meaning for the present—and even the so-called Hegel renaissance began half a century ago with a book by Benedtto Croce that undertook to distinguish what was living and what was dead in Hegel. The converse question is not even raised: what the present means in the face of Hegel; whether perhaps the reason one imagines one has attained since Hegel's absolute reason has not in fact long since regressed behind the latter and accommodated to what merely exists, when Hegelian reason tried to set the burden of existence in motion through the reason that obtains even in what exists." Adorno, "Aspects of Hegel's Philosophy," *Hegel: Three Studies* 1.

## 6.1    Hegel as a Ruin (Idealism without Absolutes)

"We should not attempt to bring about a rebirth or renaissance of the University, but think its ruins as the sedimentation of historical differences that remind us that thought cannot be present to itself." Readings, *The University in Ruins,* 171.

How does one evaluate, or even confront, a thinker such as Hegel? How can one begin to determine "what is living and what is dead in Hegel's system," what moments in his interdisciplinary Encyclopedia of *all* the philosophical sciences are too speculative, too negative, too much, too "German," too "statist" (Russell, 737- 738, 741-2; Popper, 229-82)? Recently, it has become fashionable to "deflate" Hegel, generally through a narrow textual focus (on the *Phenomenology of Spirit*  or *The Science of Logic*), in order to illuminate him as a "post-Kantian" thinker of normativity, who (supposedly) attempted to work out a normative "space of reasons," along with linguistic deliberative justifications in a way that anticipates the later Wittgenstein or Habermas.[302] Against this stand the "metaphysical" or "conciliatory" readers of Hegel, those who attempt to redeem

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[302] Such a view can be ascribed to the "Pittsburgh Hegelians" specifically, R. Pippin, R. Brandom, J. MacDowell, along with post-Kantian readers such as T. Pinkard, who regard Hegel as "both accepting and *extending* Kant's critique, ultimately turning it against the residual dogmatically metaphysical aspects of Kant's own philosophy" (Redding, "Hegel," *Stanford*). Against this view stand the "revised metaphysical" readers of Hegel, most notably C. Taylor, and Beiser, along with R. Stern and S. Houlgate, who see Hegel as inhabiting a metaphysical-transcendental space informed not only by Kant, but by a critical refashioning of the metaphysical theses of Aristotle, Spinoza, Leibniz, Herder, and Schelling. My own approach follows the latter, "metaphysical-holistic" reading of Hegel, though fractured in a "ruined direction."  One can also locate a "deconstructive" approach to Hegel, following thinkers such as Derrida (of *Glas* [1974] and "The Pit and the Pyramid" [1972]), Nancy (*The Speculative Remark* [2001]*, Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative* [1997], and C. Malabou (*The Future of Hegel,* 1996). These thinkers take a linguistic approach to the Hegelian project, recognizing Hegel as someone who anticipates many elements of the later theoretical linguistic turn. As I argue, such deconstructive approaches to Hegel are prefigured in Adorno, though I follow their general recognition of the linguistic elements of Hegelian thought.

some conception of totality, or "the whole," from Hegel's oeuvre, viewing him as providing a metaphysical—though nonetheless transcendental—way forward for philosophy.

Between such conciliatory attempts to redeem some "rational" Hegel out of his metaphysical shell, or to rescue some holistic sense of the Hegelian project, I advocate a reading of Hegel which understands his work at the outset as a "ruin." Hegel's Encyclopedic project is a ruined cathedral to "the absolute": a failed (and perhaps naïve or even tragic) attempt to unify all of knowledge under the rubric of philosophy (*EO*, 51, 53). Though Hegel aims at "a whole" rationally articulated by way of the "freedom" of the philosophical concept (*SOL*, 17*)*, such a meta-conception of philosophy ultimately fails according to Hegel's own standards as *Spirit* is seemingly unable to "digest" or "work through" the vast array of natural-historical detail in order to arrive at the triumph of *Spirit* (Rajan, "(In)Digestible" 217-18; cf. *ND*, 300-20, 326-7, 334-8). However, as in Kafka's "Imperial message," though the emperor's communique fails to arrive at its "final" (or "absolute") destination, it arrives in its own way, through a constant deferral which exceeds the original journey (4-5).[303] That is, despite—or more radically, because of—its failure to complete its own task, Hegel's corpus provides a polyphony of thought models and "prisms" through which to refract philosophy, politics, nature, and art in productive directions. Following the prefatory assertions of Adorno, placing Hegel's thinking in constellation with contemporary concerns can estrange present day thought from its own quotidian assumptions, providing a meta-critical space through which to reflect upon the purview of philosophy and its relationship to its own "margins" (that is, to other disciplines along with its own aporias and blind spots). As a self-fracturing, or self-troubling, thinker, Hegel provides the resources to think an "Idealism without absolutes," that is, a model of Idealism opened towards "heterogeneity, materiality and *différance*": moments which "disturb all absolutes" (Rajan "Introduction," 2). In this prefatory section (6.1), I will methodologically elaborate my own "ruined" reading of

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[303] As Kafka concludes, "Nobody could fight his way through with a message from a dead man. But you sit at your window when evening falls and dream it to yourself" (5). Though the message of Hegelian thought fails to arrive definitively, one is able to speculatively "dream" new possible ways of reading his corpus without absolute completion.

Hegel, following which I will argue for nature and the aesthetic as potentially critical moments through which to speculatively invade the Hegelian project (6.2).

For Hegel, philosophy is necessarily systematic, or "encyclopedic" (*EO,* 51-3). Hegel is emphatic, "the true is the whole" (*PS,* 11, 14); that is, "truth" entails the coming to (self-) consciousness of the "organic unity...of mutual necessity...[which] constitutes the life of the whole" (*PS,* 2). Such a "whole" presents the unity of all the philosophical sciences, grasping "the absolute," as it progresses through the various "patterns or shapes of consciousness" [*Gestalten des Bewußtseins*], and as "*Spirit*" [*Geist*] comes to know itself, gaining the freedom of "self–consciousness" and the autonomy of self-determination (*PS, 56; PG,* 80). The Hegelian sojourn of *Spirit* can be broadly glossed corresponding to Hegel's tripartite dialectical schema (*PS,* 40, 49-57). After moving through the prefatory domain of "consciousness" treated in the *Phenomenology, Geist* arrives at "self-consciousness," where it is able to grasp the absolute "in itself" by way of "Logic" (or Metaphysics [*EL,* 7-8; *SOL,* 7-11, 28-9, 42]), "for itself" in the "philosophy of nature," and finally, after the completion of its journey of self -formation (or *Bildung,* [*PS,* 50]), "in and for itself" in the "philosophy of *Spirit*," the result being that *Geist* is able to self-consciously and "freely" shape the world (*Mind,* 292-3, 302, 313-5). Upon reaching "absolute knowledge," *Geist* is "resolved" of external relations, overcoming the distinction between subject and object and allowing philosophy to become a practice of "ontology," that is, an analysis of "Being" itself, independent of its intermediating transcendental conditions—the mediation of the epistemic subject (*SOL,* 42-3). The Kantian distinction between the "form" and "content" of knowledge is overcome as philosophy passes from epistemology to ontology (or from "subjective" to "absolute" Idealism, [*SOL,* 40-1]).

As in Schelling's philosophy of nature, Hegel's thinking suffers under the weight of two opposing trajectories: one pulling towards self-unification and gradual ascendency (the coming to consciousness of *Geist* via the overcoming and historicization of its earlier "shapes," or moments); another towards fecundity and proliferation, as *Geist* takes countless detours through various disciplines and idiosyncrasies, which continually multiply via his countless additions and supplements (exemplified by Hegel's speculative

"*Zusätze*" and the continually evolving lecture form of his texts).[304] Though Hegel continually speaks of the "overcoming-sublation" [*Aufhebung*] of various forms—such as, nature, "sense certainty," aesthetics, religion— his work also immerses itself with painful detail in the particularities of various spheres. One sees Hegel "lingering over" (*PS,* 17) the peculiarities of crystals (*PN,* 160-78), planets (*PN,* 86-103), parsing the nuances of Zoroastrian religion and art (*A,* 323-331), along with the dazzling descriptions he provides of particular aesthetic forms. Each "shape" or "sphere" presents a "moment" of the holistic "truth" that is *Geist'*s self-realization (*PS,* 56), yet if seen in itself, each sphere provides a Leibnizian "world within a world," a semi-autonomous sphere that resists and troubles the triumph of absolute spirit ("Rajan, "Immunitary," 40). As Hegel's journey of *Spirit* progresses, the avenues and detours that *Spirit* takes likewise proliferate, placing doubt upon its triumphant arrival at absolute knowing.

Hegel seemingly invites such "diseased" transgressions of his own system when in the "Preface" to his *Phenomenology,* he describes "the tremendous power of the negative" as "an accident as such, detached from [the "self-enclosed circle" of the whole that] circumscribes it," seemingly sanctioning the enduring potential for "a moment" to gain "a separate freedom" (*PS,* 18-19; cf. Schelling, *FE,* 18). As Hegel writes:

> The circle that remains self-enclosed and, like substance, holds its moments together, is an immediate relationship, one therefore which has nothing astonishing about it. But that an accident as such, detached from what circumscribes it, what is bound and is actual only in the context with others, should attain an existence of its own and a separate freedom—this is the tremendous power of the negative...but the life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself...Spirit is the power only by looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it. (*PS,* 18-19; cf., *EL,* 39; *EO,* 51)

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[304] Occasioned by "the Remark that the *Science of Logic* devotes to the *Aufhebung*" (13), Nancy (In *The Speculative Remark*) examines a subterranean "economy of remarks" (48) subtending Hegel's thought, such that each Hegelian text "gives rise to a multiplication of texts" (60). In this manner, though Hegel is often characterized as a thinker of subsumption and conceptual imperialism, Nancy demonstrates the complex negative network of deferral operating within the Hegelian encyclopedia, such that Hegel can be seen (equally) as a thinker of negativity and speculative proliferation. Describing this phantasmatolgocial economy of remarks, Nancy writes, "From its first paragraph the Remark carries us off course or makes its own conceptual reading slide, disturbs or forbids the grasp of meaning...one is obliged to follow the re-marked and persistent trace of the text's singular slipping economy...An economy of Remarks seems to double up the economy of logical discourse...a subordinated, 'detached' dispersed economy that does not obey the strict progression of the concept" (46-48, cf. 7-19, 75-101). Hegel himself describes the 'speculative' character of the German language (*SOL,* 12).

Hegel's project attempts to theorize philosophy as a holistic (organic) system, while nonetheless giving a dangerous degree of autonomy to its individual members, striving to create a system that does not shy from "death...and devastation," from "the negative," nor from contingency or empirical particularity, domains which constantly trouble the final triumph of (conceptual) philosophy. For Hegel, the Faustian bargain of "modern philosophy"—of becoming truly "mature" in the Kantian sense of enlightenment—necessitates embracing such transcendental finitude: "looking the negative in the face," and accepting the inherent instability, or even the necessary volatility, of any philosophical system. The possibility that an "accident" could gain a certain freedom is, and must remain, a possibility for the Hegelian project.

Treating the Hegelian project as a ruin, or failure, at the start allows one to probe the immense complexity of the "detritus," or "excrement" left behind in the wake of *Geist's* conceptual sojourn (Rajan "(In) Digestible," 218, 232). In reading Hegel "against the grain" in this manner, one can, following Benjamin's "Angel of History," sift through the "pile of wreckage" left in the wake of the Hegelian "storm of progress" (*SW 4:* 391-392).[305] The figure of the "ruin" has several obvious Romantic affinities, and my own refashioning of the term owes much to Readings' "ruined" understanding of the contemporary university—seen in the broad sense as the organization of knowledge. For Readings, the "university in ruins" is not animated by nostalgia for a past golden age, for a moment of national unity, or for the capitalist "university of excellence," but rather, it is a model which affirms the continual self-fracturing of thought (166-79). This prefatory section will position my own ruined reading in relation to two prominent immanently critical approaches to the work of Hegel, that of Marxist critical theory (culminating in the Frankfurt School) and that of Bataille's (or Gasché's) "phantasmatology."[306]

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[305] Echoing such sentiments, Duque presents a reading of Hegel centered on failure in which logic (or "subject") is unable to master "substance," and thus one is compelled to recognize that "the wounds of Spirit do not necessarily heal without leaving any scars. The Hegelian system, impressive as it is, ultimately reveals itself as a miscarried attempt to reconcile nature and *theoria*, individuality and collective *praxis*" (x).

[306] I define "immanent critique" via Adorno (*Prisms,* 27-34)*,* as a mode of criticism which judges, and unfolds, a work according to its own internal logic(s), as opposed to "transcendent critique" which judges a work according to pre-conceived static criteria. For Adorno, "To read Hegel experientially is to judge him by his own criterion" (*Hegel,* 145), and further, no "reading" is complete without historical-critical reflection, and marginal supplementation, or destructive critique: "No reading of Hegel can do him justice

Following this I will demonstrate that nature and the aesthetic can be read as "phantasmalogical" sites through which to refract Hegel's thinking in productive directions (6.2). These thinkers illustrate the fundamental plasticity of the Hegelian project, rupturing it by way of its accidents and productive offshoots, demonstrating the historical malleability of his concepts and categories.

Marx was a forerunner in recognizing the plastic character of the Hegelian project, seeing Hegel as a thinker of the failed absolute, while nonetheless critically employing a Hegelian method. Despite his materialist veneer, Marx should be considered a post-Idealist thinker. As a "left Hegelian," Marx rejected Hegel's political-theological conclusions regarding the Prussian state, critically severing the Idealist "German Ideology": a holy family of speculative Idealism, religion, and capitalist political-economy, all of which served to uphold the material status quo (Marx, *German Ideology,* 147-9 172, 149-51 172-3; Marcuse, *Reason,* 252, 258-62). Despite such critiques, Marx self-consciously employed a Hegelian method in his analysis of the capitalist totality (Lukács, *Consciousness,* 234-9, 16-20). Marx's immanent extrapolation of "dialectics" from its Hegelian logical Idealist origin, in the creation of an unconditioned model of Hegelianism, is a common gesture of twentieth-century theory, explicitly undertaken by many in the Marxist tradition (Rosen, 23-54; 153-8), and that of twentieth-century French theory. Bataille drastically asserts, "I imagine that my life—or better yet, its aborting, the open wound that is my life—constitutes all by itself the refutation of Hegel's closed system" ("Letter to X," 296). But Bataille's thinking nonetheless remains eminently within the force-field of Hegelian thought, and should be seen as attempting to create a "phantasmatology" of "unemployed negativity": a Hegelianism rid from the confines of "the concept," such that one can adequately probe "the limits" of "*both* thought and being" (Bataille, *Eroticism,* 238). Both Marxism and French theory are united in their immanent refashioning of the Hegelian program: both traditions use one Hegel to move beyond another, elevating a particular moment (or "accident") to rupture his "self -enclosed circle of totality."

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without criticizing him...it is not the worst reader who provides the book with disrespectful notes in the margin" (*Hegel,* 145).

This "ruined" reading of Hegel is also (pre)figured in the work of Adorno, as seen in the prefatory quotation for this chapter in which Adorno challenges fundamental intellectual historical assumptions regarding the "evaluation" of a thinker. At the outset of his (under theorized) *Three Studies on Hegel* (1963), Adorno inverts the conventional model of intellectual history that would attempt to evaluate past thinkers in light of contemporary concerns. Instead, Adorno forwards his own historical-philosophical model (informed by Benjamin), which seeks to distance one from one's own suppositions by way of the "shock" of the past. For Adorno, the question becomes not what we—as somehow apt judges—deem "living or dead" in Hegel, but rather, how Hegel, or his texts, might see our time: "what our present means in the face of Hegel" (*Hegel,* 1). How might Hegel judge our "reality" in relation to his encyclopedic understanding of "rationality"? How might he respond to the unexpected and pathological turns Modernity has taken since his death (in 1831)?[307] The model for such a jarring and reciprocally reflexive confrontation with the past is provided by Benjamin's notion of "the constellation," in which disparate elements are arranged in a "tensioned mosaic," such that their desperate parts form a "constellation saturated with tensions" (*OT,* 34; *SW 4:* 396; *Arcades,* 14-15). Benjamin later elaborated this method in relation to surrealist montage techniques and a Brechtian-materialism, whereby the philosopher attempts to elaborate formal techniques that "estrange" readers from their quotidian attitudes, forcing them to question their everyday assumptions, along with  the ideological distributions of the sensible subtending them.[308]

   For Adorno, Hegel's corpus performs these gestures of estrangement

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[307] Schnädelbach locates the "end of Idealism" with Hegel's death in 1831 (and Goethe's in 1832). As the "end of Idealism," the following period was one of intellectual decline, splintering, and a broader crisis of European humanism, all of which were accelerated by the forces of modernization. Such tensions eventually culminating in the crises of the early twentieth-century (see, 1-16).

[308] With respect to Hegel's philosophy of nature, it is easy to deride Hegel's understanding of nature as simply false, or worse, emblematic of metaphysical excesses, especially when one views Hegel from our twenty-first-century perspective. It is precisely such a vulgar developmental view of history that Benjamin sought to overcome with his model of the constellation, in which the present is estranged from itself and "opened up" by way of an encounter with the past, that is "read against the grain" (*SW 4:*391-5). Thus, with respect to Hegel's philosophy of nature, one might examine new possible relationships between philosophy and the physical sciences in light of Hegel's inter-disciplinarity. More remains to be said regarding Benjamin relationship with dialectics, particularly his Brechtian-Hegelian notion of "dialectics at a standstill" (*Arcades,* 462-468; *SW 4:* 396).

predominantly through its turgid prose, which functions as a form of "parataxis," distancing the reader from their conventional hermeneutic assumptions (Adorno, "Parataxis," 133-5, 143; *Hegel,* 136-7, 101-2). In this way, despite (or because of) Hegel's "lack of sensitivity to the linguistic medium," he unintentionally broaches the proper dissonant relationship of thought to language (*Hegel,* 121). Hegel's repeated stumbling, stuttering, stammering, repetition, his circling and continually beginning again, all refract negatively (in a modernist sense) the proper self-troubling philosophical comportment to language: "all philosophical language is a language in opposition to language, marked with the stigma of its own impossibility" (Adorno, *Hegel* 100). Such sentiments are echoed by Derrida, who proclaims Hegel to be "the last philosopher of the book and the first thinker of writing" (*Of Grammatology,* 26). Adorno continues his linguistic analysis by proclaiming Hegel's works to be "anti-texts" (*Hegel,* 119), annotated lectures, or "films of thought" which constantly unwork themselves so as to describe "the substance of philosophy as process," and as such should be read with the "speculative ear" (*Hegel,* 121, 122-3).[309] Via his performative textual unworkings, Hegel provokes a metaphysical experience in his readers—in which one "reads," or reflects upon, oneself reading— provoking meta-reflection and "supplementation" via the reader (Rajan, *Supplement,* 52). For Hegel, "we learn by experience that we mean something other than we meant to mean; and this correction of our meaning compels our knowing to go back to the proposition, and understand it in some other way": philosophy must move away from the conventionally deductive "ratiocinative proposition" towards the "speculative proposition," which engages actively with questions of "plasticity," or form (*PS,* 39, 66; Malabou, *Futures,* 11-12). In resisting the dogmatic equation of "clarity" with "truth," Hegel's texts strive for "intelligibility without confusing it with clarity," employing language (or concepts) in a speculative way to move beyond language: "If philosophy can be defined at all, it is an effort to express things one cannot speak about, to help express the non-identical despite the fact that expressing it identifies it at the same time" (Adorno, *Hegel,* 105, 101-102).

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[309] For the complexities of Adorno's understanding of "listening" see "Types of Musical Conduct" (1-20) in *Introduction to the Sociology of Music.* For Adorno's positive theory of language as a "resistance" to the demand for "understandability," see "Theses on the Language of the Philosopher" (35-39).

Hegel's corpus, considered as an "organic whole"—in which the "parts" refract the "whole" in various ways—provides a "monadological" (Benjamin, *OT,* 27) likeness of Hegel's historical-political world, one that is eminently divergent from our own, with very different political-economic, scientific, and philosophical assumptions.[310] It is far too easy to simply cast aside Hegel as one who has little to say to our contemporary reality: as some Prussian apologist who dwelled excessively in meaningless dialectical abstraction, or one who attempted to re-import metaphysics into the study of nature. Upon closer examination, one sees in Hegel the origin of a properly "modern" philosophical sentiment, a thinker who sought to understand philosophy as "its own time comprehended in thought," depicting the emergence of philosophy as an interdisciplinary dialogue with its own historical contingencies (*PR,* 21).[311] Following Aristotle, Hegel began with the particular worldviews and assumptions (or *Vorstellungen*) of his own time, which he sought to test and elevate via the properly universal tribunal of "the concept" [*Begriff*], seeing the working out of the broader "infinite" absolute from within a "finite" historical-empirical world. If one attempts to evaluate Hegel's *Naturphilosophie,* aesthetics, or politics, according to our contemporary standards, of course they will be found deficient. However, if one sees them in relation to Hegel's own time, to Hegel's quotidian assumptions and debates, one sees a truly unique and unparalleled conception of philosophy as an interdisciplinary dialogue with its historical era. Understood in this way, Hegel's thinking provides a "prism" through which we can view another possible relationship to the world, presenting alternative models of philosophy, politics, and self-consciousness (Adorno, *Prisms,* 7-9). Hegel, along with many other German Idealists and Romantics, provides "meta-critical" perspectives through which to understand the evolution of philosophy, and by which to confront our current conceptions of what philosophy is and should be as a discipline.

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[310] For Benjamin, the task of criticism entails "monadologically" capturing a particular historical epoch via "Ideas" As Benjamin asserts in his "Epistemo-Critical Prologue": "The idea is a monad—this means, *in nuce:* each idea contains an image of the world" (*OT,* 27).

[311] In this way, Hegel can be considered a "philosophical modernist," as defined by Bernstein ("Political Modernism," 56-8): that is, one who self-reflexively employs "modern" philosophical notions.

In the philosophical literature, it has become far too commonplace to simply cast off Hegel wholesale as some "panlogicist," who attempted to define all of "the real" by way of "the rational" (*PR,* 20-21).[312] Hegel is often cast as an "absolute Idealist" according to whom "everything happens of necessity according to reason" (Beiser, *Hegel,* 76). For Beiser, the status of "contingency," or finitude, is one of the central questions raised by Hegel's oeuvre (*Hegel,* 76-9), and one already explored in Hegel's lifetime via the "Krug's pen" objection, with regard to the relation of Logic (or Idealism) to the multiplicity and variety of the natural world (*PN,* 25; Beiser, *Hegel,* 78). Ultimately, Beiser concludes that there is evidence for both interpretations of Hegel's project (*Ibid,* 78); however, as I will be show throughout this chapter, the fecundity of *Spirit'*s detritus, along with its constant detours, through "worlds within worlds," should at least warrant skepticism to the final triumph of *Geist* in absolute knowing. As Žižek has pointed out, Hegelian "necessity" is always already (dialectically) shot through with "contingency" (*Less than Nothing,* 123-4, 136, 143-51).

Further, in light of the prefatory quotation by Adorno, one can question why such a logical-totalitarian reading of Hegel is seemingly so needed: what does the desire to strawman Hegel as a totalitarian logo-centrist say about our time and philosophical context? Such a panlogicist caricature is shared by many in the analytic tradition, who scapegoat Hegel as a thinker of metaphysical bombast so as to justify their own impoverished epistemic view of philosophy. Such readings are exemplified by the (analytic) post-Kantian interpretations of Pippin, who vastly abridges the force-field of Hegel's influences, focusing solely on simplified versions of Kant and Aristotle (Pippin, *Shadows,* 1-37; Houlgate, "Review," 765-6). Ironically, such a view is shared by many in the tradition of post-structuralism, particularly Deleuze, who explicitly positions his

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[312] Hegel's "*Doppelsatz*" (or "double-dictum")— "What is actual is rational and what is rational is actual" (*PR,* 21)—is perhaps the most misunderstood in his oeuvre and has been the subject of various misreadings, commencing already in Hegel's own lifetime (Pinkard, *Hegel,* 493-4, 497). In the context of the post-Napoleonic Prussian state, such statements were taken as Hegel's apology for the Prussians state as an "end of history," an "actual" endorsement of what philosophy had "ideally" articulated. However, in actuality, such a statement should not be seen as endorsing some particular historical moment, but rather, as opening an explicitly objective Idealist dialogue between reality and thought (or the empirical and transcendental).

Kantian-Nietzschean transcendental empiricism "against the dialectic."[313] As Hegel so aptly asserts in the *Phenomenology,* "enlightenment" and "superstition" are co-constitutive, dialectically expressing themselves in relation to each other (*PS,* 329-55); thus much of so-called anti-Hegelian thought actually justifies itself "negatively," via its opposition to the supposed metaphysical caprice of Hegelian speculation. Paraphrasing C. Schmitt, oftentimes in politics (and in philosophy), who one's enemy is will tell you much about who they are (26-27).

It may be objected that there does exist a "reconciliatory" or totalizing teleology of "identity" in Hegel's work in which individual particularity is sublated in favour of the general level of the concept—an understanding of the "truth as the whole" (*PS,* 11). Though his philosophy does undeniably progress upward towards "absolute knowing," such an "absolute" does not herald some final triumph of philosophy, but rather, it is a scene of immense pathos and negativity, a passage Hegel describes as the "Golgotha/boneyard of absolute knowing" [*die Schädelstätte des absoluten Geistes*] (*PS,* 493; *PG,* 591). It is a scene of ruin and continual transient progression: "a gallery of moving images" (*PS,* 492). The *Phenomenology,* despite its seeming triumphant arrival at "absolute knowing," perhaps has more in common with a text such as Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (1939): a work which begins in *medias res*, only to (re)arrive at its own beginning, a stuttering conclusion that does everything but proclaim the triumph of the logos (see further, Comay & Ruda, *The Dash, 30*-31, 34-36).[314] Hegel's difficulties with

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[313] At the outset of *Difference and Repetition* (1968), Deleuze defines his work—in which he would finally "do philosophy in his own name" (xv)—as part of a "generalized anti-Hegelianism*"* (xiv), a sentiment which seemingly animates much of his Nietzschean-Spinozistic conception of thought. For more on Deleuze's Nietzschean rejections of the dialectic see, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (8-10, 195-8). It should be noted that (specifically in *Difference and Repetition,* 26-7, 42-55) Deleuze does not wholly dismiss Hegel; in fact, his analysis of Hegel's "infinite" conceptual model of cognition is generally sympathetic, paralleling the "negative dialectical" interventions of a thinker such as Adorno. Much more remains to be said about the relationship(s) between Deleuze and Hegel, especially given that both thinkers seek to intervene upon and trouble the stable Kantian transcendental subject. Both thinkers' stage innovative and experimental dialogues between empirical and transcendental.

[314] Hegel describes the cinematics of "absolute knowing" in a manner that affirms transience against some final static realization of absolute knowledge: "History is a conscious self-mediating process— Spirit emptied out into Time; but this externalization, this Kenosis, is equally an externalization of itself; the negative of the negative itself. This Becoming presents a slow-moving succession of Spirits, *a gallery of images*, each of which, endowed with all the riches of Spirit, moves thus slowly just because the Self has to penetrate and digest this entire wealth of its substance" (*PS,* 492).

"beginning" are admitted and self-evident (*SOL,* 45-9); less recognized are his difficulties with "ending," or with the transition from one encyclopedic domain to another. Hegel cannot logically describe the transition from "nature" to "Spirit" other than through the metaphor of "the phoenix" (*PN,* 444-5; Rajan, "Cultural Idealism," 65); a similar "*Deus ex machina*" conditions the "end of art," and the transition to the sobriety of the concept (Rajan, "Writing," 141).[315]

In these ways, anyone who wishes to deride Hegel as an imperialist totalizer must also account for his immense negativity, for those dissonant moments in his encyclopedia which gain a certain autonomy, "a separate freedom" (*PS,* 18), and which threaten the absolute closure of the system (cf. Schelling, *FE,* 18). Though Hegel chastised Schelling for continually "beginning again" (*History of Phil 3,* 515*)*, his own thought suffers from a similar agony (or embarrassment) of beginning: from continual and pathological repetitions which constantly try to reiterate the project as a whole, each time (re)casting it in a slightly different light (*EO,* 48-9). As Iversen & Melville write, "All Hegelian beginnings are in some sense middles" (156), as Hegel's thinking progresses according to the form of the "circle," with the completed encyclopedia being described as a "circle of circles" (*EL,* 39): an organic and reciprocally reinforcing system, which mediates nature and history, and outside of which, no "sense certainty" exists (*PS,* 58-66).

In what follows, I will elaborate the immanent critique of Hegel's work undertaken by Marx and continued in Hegelian Marxism, Bataille (mediated by Gasché), and Adorno. To read Hegel as a "ruin" entails seeing his project as constitutively incomplete and thus perpetually supplemented by way of its "post–history" (Benjamin, *OT,* 25-7). This ruined reading of Hegel follows in the footsteps of the interventions of Marx and Bataille (and Gasché), along with Adorno, thinkers who recognize the self-troubling, plastic, and critical power of Hegel's oeuvre such that it can be short-circuited and read beyond itself by way of its post-histories.

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[315] Hegel's *History of Philosophy* also ends strangely, with Schelling (not Hegel's own system) as the apex of modern philosophy (512-554). "Modern philosophy" begins with the ambiguous doublet of Bacon and Boehme, the latter of which inaugurates the beginning of "genuinely German" philosophy (191, 193, 197).

### 6.1.1 Marx, Materialism, Critical Theory: Dialectics Beyond Hegel

"The mystification which the dialectical suffers in Hegel's hands by no means prevents him from being the first to present [political economy's] general forms of motion in a comprehensive and conscious manner. With him it is standing on its head. It must be inverted, in order to discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell." Marx, *Capital,* 103.

A critical figure in the post-historical reception of Hegel's thought is Marx, along with the broader tradition of "historical-materialism" and Hegelian infused currents of Marxism stemming from Lukács and K. Korsch. This tradition culminates in the writings of the Frankfurt School, particularly Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse, though is continued—though within a broader theoretical economy—by the more recent scholarship of Žižek and Jameson. Marx's interventions disclose the fundamental plasticity of Hegelian thought, representing a moment in the post-historical "gallery of shapes" (*PS,* 492) that is the reception of Hegel, or with Esposito, the German "thought from the outside" (5-8, 88). The Frankfurt School should be seen in line with these Hegelian-Marxist developments, explicitly following Lukács' return to the Hegelian basis of Marx's method, that is, to the "ideal" theoretical moment—specifically the Hegelian analysis of totality—that serves as the transcendental basis of Marx's thought (*Consciousness,* 16-20, 223-4). The Frankfurt School continues the early Lukács' theoretical Marxist interventions with the notable rejection of the messianic role Lukács accords to the "proletariat" as the resolution of world history (Lukács, *Consciousness,* 83-209; Buck-Morss, *Origin,* 28-32). Adorno is unique in his commitment to reading Marx and Hegel in a negatively dialectical conjunction, as both thinkers are presented in constellation with neither attaining primacy: Adorno criticizes the excessively Idealist (or "ideological") moments of Hegel via Marx; and the excessively materialist (or economic) moments of Marx via Hegel (*ND*, 354-8). Adorno refuses the vulgar historical materialist culmination of philosophy with Marxism, instead positioning Marxism as a "specter" which continually haunts and problematizes any final realization of philosophy (*ND,* 3-4; cf. Derrida, *Specters,* xx, 3-4, 10-13). Marx, and the tradition which arises in response to his work, should be seen as an important immanent "post-history" of the Hegelian project, another "reading" of Hegel which allows his project to "live on" [*Sur-vivre*] and be experimented with in productive directions (Derrida, *Specters,* xvii-xx).

Marx's "historical materialism"—along with the political application of such a world-view —is inextricably linked to a Hegelian understanding of the world, an

immanent refashioning of Hegelian Idealism, not a wholesale rejection of it: "Marx's critique of Hegel is the direct continuation and extension of the criticism that Hegel himself leveled at Kant and Fichte...Marx's dialectical method continued what Hegel had striven for but had failed to achieve in a concrete form" (Lukács, *Consciousness*, 17).[316] Just as Fichte saw himself as continuing (and completing) the Kantian project in the "spirit and not the letter," Marx saw himself as extending Hegel's dialectical analyses of totality into the domain of political economy—an immanent critique employing Hegel beyond himself. Lukács (and Korsch) locate Marxism as an application and realization of the main tenets of the German Idealist program. For Lukács, "orthodox Marxism" does not "imply the uncritical acceptance of the results of Marx's investigations," nor "the belief" in this or that thesis, nor the "exegesis of a 'sacred' book," but rather, "refers exclusively to *method*," that is, the dialectical understanding of the relations of production in terms of an organic social "whole" (*Consciousness,* 1, 9, 15-18; cf. Korsch, 35-37). Thus, contra V. Lenin, or L. Althusser, the essence of Marxism does not lie in some set of political principles, nor some fundamental "essence," but rather, "Marxism" is thought as a historically informed material-philosophical perspective, eminently shaped by the Hegelian worldview.

When Marx describes his materialist method at the outset of *Capital* (1867) as the "inversion" of Hegel's dialectic—which in its Idealist formulation is "standing on its head"—such assertions should be seen as an intrinsic application of Hegel's dialectical method to the sphere of "political economy" (*Capital*, 102-103). Though Hegel takes up political economy in several instances, notably in the *Philosophy of Right*, such analyses are not undertaken in a genuinely critical manner, as Hegel cuts short his own dialectical historical understanding of philosophy, hypostasizing many elements of his specific historical reality, most notably elements of the Prussian restoration and his historically specific post-Napoleonic conception of the state (see, *Right,* 329-332, 383-89, 467-72;

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[316] For Lukács, "The primacy of the category of totality is the bearer of the principle of revolution in science" (27, 28-9); that is, the true "revolutionary" element of Marxism lies in its critical appropriation of the Hegelian conception of totality or "system." As Lukács continues, "It is at reality itself that Hegel and Marx part company" (17); that is, Marx sought to employ the Hegelian framework to analyze the actual existing (or material-historical) structures of "Capital."

Marcuse, *Reason,* 182, 189-223). For Marx, Hegel presented a further instance of the distinctly "German Ideology," an Idealist "holy alliance" between the nefarious forces of capital, religion, and Idealist thought, all of which sought to sedate the masses through idle intellectual abstraction, occluding insight into the real historical-material conditions of class subjugation. For Marx, Hegel's "grotesque and craggy" methodological Idealism distracted intellectuals from real-material relations ("Discovering Hegel," 7). Despite Hegel's opiating Idealism, Marx is adamant that Hegel is no "dead dog"—an explicit reference to Lessing's defense of Spinoza in the "Pantheism controversy"—but rather, one who provides the philosophical armature to articulate the encyclopedic "whole," allowing one to chart the "social whole," or the "vast automaton" that is "Capital" (Marx, *Capital,* 102, 502; Lukács, *Consciousness,* 27). As Schelling chastised Leibniz and Spinoza respectively for merely articulating the "ideal" and "real" moments of philosophy separately, Marx saw Hegel as providing the "ideal" basis of thought, which must be supplemented by a "real" analysis of "practical" material social forms: a theoretical "interpretation" that would lay the groundwork for practical "change" (Marx, "Theses," 143-4). Marx illuminates the pliability of the Hegelian method, employing dialectics and an encyclopedic form of analysis beyond Hegel in the formulation of his own "Hegelianism without reserve."

The essence of Marx's materialist intervention upon the Hegelian program can be summarized as follows: "the ideal is nothing but the material world reflected in the mind of man, and translated into forms of thought" (*Capital,* 102; cf. *German Ideology,* 172-3; Lukács, *Consciousness,* 18).[317] For Marx, one cannot begin with some abstract conceptual notion of "freedom," but rather, one must chart the working out of freedom from within a particular political-historical situation. In his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1843), Marx contrasts the "radical" theoretical advancements of German Idealist philosophy, with its lofty ideas of freedom and self-actualization, to the backwardness of the German political-material situation (59-60, 62-3). Such Baroque circumstances must be dialectically "abolished by the realization of philosophy," which

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[317] This animus is echoed throughout Marx's corpus, most notably in his 1859 "Preface": "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness" ("Preface," 4).

can only take place via thought's actualization in praxis by the "proletariat" (*Ibid,* 65; Lukács, *Consciousness,* 149, 205). The practical consciousness of the oppressed proletariat enacts in praxis what philosophy could only speculatively articulate in theory (Marx, "Theses," 144-45).

On the ontological-anthropological level Marx is in accord with the Hegelian dialectic of recognition, by which "man" comes to know himself through "estrangement" [*Entfremdung*] in the "alterity" of nature, which is in turn reciprocally shaped through practices of "social labour" (*1844,* 125). Historically, Marx subscribes to the upward trajectory of the Hegelian project, in which, through "mindful" practices of self-realization, humans come to self-consciousness of themselves, and are thus able to erect increasingly complex social-political-normative frameworks. However, for Marx, Hegel prematurely enters into the domain of "absolute spirit" (of art, religion and philosophy), revealing his allegiance to a Prussian infused "constitutional monarchy," and cutting short his own dialectic of history (Adorno, *ND,* 334-7). For Marx, Hegel refuses to consider the emergent tensions of the capitalist market along with the degree to which new political forms (such as communism) might be imagined as a response to new historical developments (Marcuse, *Reason,* 258-262, 273-322). Marx immanently extends, while criticizing, the main tenets of Hegelian thinking, using one Hegel to move beyond another Hegel, as after all, there are "many Hegels" (d'Hondt, 207-10).

## 6.1.2 Bataille's Phantasmatology: Towards a "Hegelianism without Reserve"

"Therefore, to begin with, I do not as of yet have full command over the images slumbering in the mine or the pit of my inwardness, am not as yet able to recall them at will. No one knows what an infinite host of images of the past slumbers in him; now and then they do indeed accidentally awake, but one cannot, as it is said, call them to mind." *Hegel, Philosophy of Mind,* 453, cf. 205.

In his 1978 text on the work of Georges Bataille (*Georges Bataille: Phenomenology and Phantasmatology*), Gasché elaborates Bataille's logic of the "phantasm": a "scientific myth" (1), or a constellation of abject elements left out of Hegel's sojourn of *Spirit,* moments that, via their expulsion, constitute the limits of the Hegelian encyclopedia. If for Hegel, "Knowledge works" (or "labours") to gradually complete the "circle of thought," Bataille sought to probe those unproductive (or "wasteful") domains— "poetry, laughter, ecstasy"—with all the rigors of the Hegelian

encyclopedia (*Inner Experience,* 111; cf. Adorno, *ND,* 8-10). By negatively traversing the Hegelian phenomenological method, Bataille "aims at the development of a phantasmatology that passes through the different stages of the becoming of the *Spirit* in an order contrary to that of the Hegelian encyclopedia" (Gasché, *Phantasmatology,* 2-3).[318] Bataille strives to develop a "Hegelianism without reserve," in which "negativity" is "no longer determined in a process or system" (Derrida, "Without Reserve," 259-60). Such an unrestrained Hegelianism is arrived at via an immanent reconfiguration of the Hegelian program, in which the "restricted economy" of the Hegelian system is fractured by the abject "general economy" of elements which remain outside the "circle" of thought (*Accursed,* 19-28). Bataille should not be seen as simply criticizing or disregarding Hegel in favour of some irrational Nietzscheanism (though Nietzsche also remains central for Bataille). In fact, Bataille continually expresses his reverence for the Hegelian program: "No one more than [Hegel] understood in depth the possibilities of intelligence (no document is comparable to his—it is the summit of positive intelligence)" (*Inner Experience,* 109). Bataille's aim is to immanently fracture Hegel by way of Hegel's own negativity, via "the introduction of a lawless intellectual series into the world of intellectual thought" (*Visions of Excess*, 80), such that "one Hegel exceeds the other" (Gasché, *Phantasmatology,* 255-56).[319]

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[318] Gasché mentions that his original intention for the project was to articulate a base materialist "pineal logic" operative throughout the Hegelian encyclopedia that would require "a traversing of the Hegelian philosophy of nature, a confrontation with the weak link in the dialectical chain...nature as the fully exteriorized idea" (2-3). Despite this original intention, Gasché does not deal with Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* within the text. Taking Gasché's lead, I take nature to be a fundamental phantasm through which to trouble and probe the Hegelian project, one which I elaborate in greater depth in the following section.

[319] Gasché is adamant that Bataille's phantasmatology is not simply some rejection, or opposition to Hegel, instead, glossing the particularity of Bataille's critical "disagreement" with Hegel, Gasché writes: "Bataille conducts his disagreement with Hegel through the perspective of materialism, psychoanalysis, and anthropology, which shake themselves to their own scientific foundations through their mutual interactions. Such a disagreement with Hegel can no longer simply be called negative: Hegel is in no way the victim of the attack. The contact of particular 'scientific' discourses with the Hegelian text will, rather, disturb his philosophy in such a way that it brings forth the form within itself that it cannot master: *One Hegel exceeds the other.* What takes place in this debate with Hegel and the simultaneous shattering of the invoked scientific discourses is not the birth of a new science resting on reinforced foundations, but rather the birth of what we call *Phantasmatology*" (*Phantasmatology,* 255-56). However, Gasché's employment of "phantasmatology" is apocalyptic: Hegel is exploded from within, and one is left to wonder what "future" of Hegel can be recovered from such detritus. My own employment of the "phantasm" seeks to similarly immanently fracture Hegel by way of the alternative logics present in his corpus (notably aesthetics and nature), demonstrating a "plasticity" inherent in his thinking (Malabou, *Future,* 5-12).

Bataille (and Gasché) are correct to see within the Hegelian program a polyphony of slumbering "mystical," "imagistic," or "esoteric" logics, which are "still not thought raised to the form of reason" (Gasché, *Phantasmatology,* 210).[320] Such logics, anticipating the imagistic associations of the Freudian "dream work," can be employed to short circuit the Hegelian project, forcing a confrontation between Hegel's conceptual system and its abject "phantasms." Bataille's confrontation with Hegel takes the form of parody, a recasting of the Hegelian tragic sojourn as a farce— Bataille undertakes to "'mimic' absolute knowledge..." (*Inner Experience,* 108-9)—a "laughter" at philosophy, which continually exposes thought to its outside. Bataille parodies the "becoming God" that the subject of *The Phenomenology* supposedly undergoes upon reaching "absolute knowledge," and "amidst the throes of laughter and parody," exposes the possibility of (unproductive) logics other than Hegelian "labour" or "work" (*Inner Experience,* 43, 111, x). In Malabou's terms, Bataille imagines a plethora of "plastic futures" for the Hegelian program (*Future,* 5-16), providing a speculative "epigenesis" of new possible arrangements of the Hegelian encyclopedia (*Epigenesis,* 36-8).[321]

Bataille should not be seen as some reactionary irrationalist out to wholly disregard the Hegelian-Idealist program, nor one who sought to dispense with reason (or philosophy) wholesale. Instead, Bataille negatively harnesses the energies of the Hegelian

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[320] The broad question of "mysticism," or the mystical motivations of Hegel's thought —along with the presence of hermetic, Böhmean, Kabbalistic, alchemic, and theosophical motifs throughout his oeuvre—is dealt with extensively by G. Magee, in *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition* (see, 1-3, 36- 51, 127-138, 150-166). Benjamin provides a sardonic gloss on Hegel's mysticism (though more disparagingly) in a letter to Scholem, "If we were to get into [Hegel's] work for just a short time, I think we would soon arrive at the spiritual physiognomy that peers out of it" that of an intellectual brute, a mystic of brute force, the worst sort there is: but a mystic, nonetheless" (*BC,* 113).

[321] Malabou locates the "promise of plasticity"—understood as a constellation of meanings relating to the synthetic "plastic" potential of materials and concepts—as providing the horizon for new "futures" of the Hegelian program (*Future,* 5-9). Malabou's text charts the centrality of plasticity to the Hegelian project: from the plastic arts, through to the "plastic individual" of the Greek polis, and finally, the plastic nature of the Hegelian speculative proposition (or "philosophical plasticity," 12) and dialectics more broadly (9-12). This plastic promise names "the excess of the future over the future" (6), providing a vibrant post-history for the Hegelian program, which can now be understood "as the relation which subjectivity maintains with the accidental" (12). In, *Epigenesis,* Malabou philosophically re-appropriates the biological notion of epigenesis—which, opposing pre-formation, describes the growth of embryos through the gradual differentiation of cells (14, 36-40)—as a model through which to redeem the Kantian transcendental amidst calls for its "relinquishing" (18) within the horizon of speculative realism (particularly by Meillassoux, 17-18). Thinking the transcendental in terms of "epigenesis" allows Malabou to theorize an evolutionary model of transcendental grounding and *a priori* thought, securing the possibility of a "future" for the Kantian program, based in her experimental re-appropriations (16).

project in the creation of a negative or counter-encyclopedia of perversions, most aptly exemplified in his two-volume methodical study of *Eroticism* (1957). Describing his "phantasmatological" aim for the collection, Bataille writes with a pathos and texture clearly reminiscent of Hegel's *Encyclopedia*:

> I wanted a mode of thinking that would measure up to those moments—a thinking that was removed from the concepts of science...yet rigorous in the extreme, as the coherence of a system of thought exhausting the totality of the possible...we need a thinking that does not fall apart in the face of horror, a self-consciousness that does not steal away when it is time to explore possibility to the limit. (*Eroticism,* 238)

Bataille's "phantasmatology" is such a mode of thinking, one "removed from the concepts of science...yet rigorous to the extreme," a counter-encyclopedia capable of charting the "general economy" of surplus phantasms, those moments at the extremes of thought and being. One is reminded of Hegel's declarations that *Spirit* must "look the negative in the face" and "tarry with it" in order to win itself for "truth" (*PS,* 18-19). In such a manner, one could imagine a scandalous, negative phenomenology (a "phantasmatology") parodying Hegel's sojourn of *Spirit*. For Bataille, such a tarrying is taken to the extreme in an attempt to create a model of thought for "the limits" of the possible, and perhaps the possibility of their overcoming. Bataille views the Hegelian system from the perspective of "the accident" (*PS,* 18): those abject phantasmatological moments—imagistic and sensuous domains beyond the purview of the concept— which, by their expulsion, constitute the boundaries of Hegel's philosophical encyclopedia. Following Adorno's negative dialectical interventions (*ND,* 8-11), if troubled, or tarried with, as Bataille's phantasmatology does, Hegel's thought is shown to be self–fracturing and readable in experimental plastic directions. It becomes, with Derrida, an incomplete "specter," a "*hauntology,*" of deferred logics, and incomplete ideals which can never fully be articulated (*Specters,* 3-10).

It is essential to see how Bataille, along with many other of his generation in France (Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze, Sartre), do not simply cast away Hegel for some Nietzschean logic, but rather, they seek to immanently work through the Hegelian program, exposing it to its own marginalized phantasms and attempting to rupture the Hegelian "circle of consciousness" from within (Gasché, *Phantasmatology,* 238; *PS,* 18-

19). Bataille is one who—in light of Foucault's proclamations—understood the price that had to be paid to think against Hegel:

> [O]ur age, whether through logic or epistemology, whether through Marx or through Nietzsche, is attempting to flee Hegel...to truly escape Hegel involves an appreciation of the price we have to pay to detach ourselves from him. It assumes we are aware of the extent to which Hegel, insidiously perhaps, is close to to us; it implies a knowledge in that which permits us to think against Hegel, of that which remains Hegelian. We have to determine the extent to which our anti-Hegelianism is possibly one of the tricks directed against us, at the end of which he stands, motionless, waiting for us. (Foucault, *Archeology,* 235)

In relation to many in his generation, the uniqueness of Bataille's phantasmatological approach lies in its situating of the Hegelian "restricted economy" of the concept within the broader phantasmatological "general economy": presenting Hegel's system alongside other "non-identical," or non-useful logics, such as those of eroticism and transgression (*Accursed,* 19-28). Bataille invites a consideration of the other logics "slumbering in the mind or the pit of...inwardness" that is the Hegelian program (Hegel, *Mind,* 453). The following sections will consider art and nature as phantasmatic sites that contain lucidities other than the concept. These abject specters continually expose Hegelian philosophy to its own un-thought, allowing for the formulation of a mode of Idealism without absolutes.

## 6.2    Art and Nature: Abject Moments in Relation to the System

"Do I intend to minimize Hegel's attitude? But the contrary is true! I want to show the incomparable scope of his approach. To that end I cannot veil the very minimal (and even inevitable) part of failure." Bataille, "Hegel, Death and Sacrifice" 293.

In parts one and two of this dissertation, I examined Adorno and Benjamin's inhabitation of the Idealist space of philosophical "meta-critique": investigating how both thinkers developed novel conceptions of philosophy by immanently "working through" the German-Idealist Romantic tradition. In part three of this project, which focuses on Schelling and Hegel respectively, it is argued that such a deconstruction, or self-troubling of thought, is already at work in both Hegel and Schelling such that different moments of their corpus can be read against each other, "short circuiting" their work in provocative

directions.[322] In Schelling, the fraught dynamism—or "original diremption"— of nature continually troubles the stability of thought with its incessant propagation and unending productiveness. In Hegel, the sheer volume of material that *Geist* needs to "digest," or labour through, en route to the absolute (Rajan, "(In) Digestible," 221)—from the entire history of world religion, art, and philosophy (the three domains that constitute the realm of the absolute), along with the whole of the natural world, and the political economic sphere—casts doubt upon *Geist's* final triumph in "absolute knowing." According to Hegel, *Geist* progresses from its latency in nature, coming to consciousness in the human realm, eventually becoming actualized in politics and other normative undertakings, until it finally arrives at the realm of the "absolute," in which humans, via a self-conscious understanding of the movement of *Geist,* finally rise to "maturity" and are able to participate in the conscious actualization of freedom (Hegel, *Mind,* 292). Hegel's oeuvre presents the same dual trajectories that Schelling posits in nature: of ascendency through a *Stufenfolge* or "self-organizing series," that gradually forms itself into a "logic," in tension with the seemingly needless fecundity of nature as it proliferates in various branches—forming "worlds within worlds." The extent to which this tension can be resolved within Hegel's corpus is the subject of intense debate, and such an ambiguity is transferred into the very notion of "*Aufhebung,"* or "sublation," which means at once preservation (as something higher) and negation or destruction (*EL,* 154). Despite the supposed final triumph of the concept in the sphere of philosophy in the *Science of Logic* (14-22), Hegel is a thinker who stutters, lingers, and cannot move on in a straightforward or linear sense: "Hegel cannot decide the past is past" (Rajan, "Writing,"140). As Comay has rightly pointed out, Hegel's work is shot through with the ambiguities and traumas of the psychoanalytic "work of mourning": how does one move on, how (or what) does one

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[322] In his introduction to Ruda and Comay's *The Dash* (and the "short circuit series" more generally), Žižek articulates his (Lacanian) "short circuiting" of philosophy, one which disrupts thought's "smooth functionality," providing an "inherent decentring of the interpreted text, which brings to light its "un-thought," its disavowed presuppositions and consequences" (VII). Though Žižek generally relies heavily on Lacanian psychoanalysis to undertake such interventions (from the outside), I argue that German Idealism—as embodied by Hegel and Schelling—is always already short circuiting itself, fracturing its own attempts at completion by way of ceaseless proliferation.

remember (to forget)?[323] How does one know when a form of life or sphere has passed such that "Owl of Minerva" may fly, and philosophy may utter its summations of the day's events, painting its "grey on grey" (*Right,* 23)?

Two notable sites of such lingering and proliferation are the aesthetic and nature, both of which occupy a curious position with respect to philosophy (or *Geist*). With respect to aesthetics, Hegel is adamant that "art…is a thing of the past" (*A,* 11*)*, standing against many of his generation (such as Friedrich Schlegel, Schiller, or the early Schelling), who position art above philosophy as the final culmination of human spirit.[324] By contrast, for Hegel, art has been overcome by philosophy, the new modern form of life, which will describe the complex social networks of the modern individual. With respect to nature, *Spirit* is challenged to overcome its latency and alterity in the natural world, leaving behind its antiquated merely sensuous form, in its becoming autonomous and rational "in-and for itself." As a philosophical modernist, Hegel is not nostalgic for past golden- ages—for the lost unities of Greek culture (between art, beauty, and philosophy), nor for the sensuous immediacy of spirit with nature. Instead, he spurs one to recognize the dawning of a new "modern" age: "a birth time and a period of transition to a new era" (*PS,* 6; *EL,* 2). From the endless and repetitive birth-disease-death cycle of nature, "Spirit" emerges "as a phoenix," departing nature for more (supposedly) refined realms (*PN,* 445). For Hegel, culture has become "rational": it has entered the domain of philosophy, or "the concept," [*Begriff*], leaving behind the lower immediate and sensuous "representations" [*Vorstellungen*] of nature, art and religion. According to Hegel, before such domains, "we bow the knee no longer" (*A,* 103).

This constellation of nature and aesthetics is perhaps first (philosophically) articulated by Kant in his *CPJ* (1789), where Kant elaborates the shared logic of "reflective judgment" subtending both domains. In the first part of the *CPJ*, Kant

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[323] For Comay, Hegel's thought returns and confronts one with the nature of experience as always already "missed" or "lapsed," a latecomer on its own scene (*Mourning Sickness,* 153, 5-7). Via a reading of Hegel on the French Revolution, Comay (in a Benjaminian fashion) extrapolates that political projects which fail to master this traumatic kernel of experience—its always already delayed, or "untimely character" (6)—are doomed to failure, trauma, and perpetual repetition.

[324] It should be noted that after his 1803-4 *Philosophy of Art* and *On University Studies,* Schelling makes no mention of art, despite its importance in his early writings. This early, absolute position of art is illustrated most forcefully by his *STI,* which makes art the culmination of *Spirit's* development (219-36).

articulates this "pseudo-faculty" of (reflective) judgment in relation to questions of beauty and sublimity, while in the second part, Kant attempts to approach the comprehensibility of nature as "a whole" by way of a further extension of "reflective judgment," which speculatively generates a universal out of a particular moment.[325] Kant seems to deny substantial cross-pollination between these two domains, though in a Rousseauesque spirit, Kant does castigate "fine art" as a "deficient" mode of the beautiful in comparison to the "free beauties" of the natural world (*CPJ,* 114-116). In my previous chapter on Schelling, I argued that though Kant's *Third Critique* continues the subjective-Idealist excision of nature from the philosophical system, it also revolutionizes the ground upon which philosophy is undertaken, such that Kant's terminology (specifically his regulative notion of "Organism") provides the means to move beyond the epistemic subject into the objective-Idealist domain. Likewise, with respect to art and aesthetics, though Kant seemingly denies art any meaning in itself[326]—independent of the "judgment" of the subject—the *CPJ* provides the beginnings (specifically with notions of "reflective judgment," "genius," and "*Sensus Communis"*) of another logic, through which art is able to contest "our standard epistemological and moral vocabulary," providing the means to "(re) connect... the modern subject or self with an order beyond it" (Bernstein, *Fate,* 8, 7; Hammer, *Modernism,* 23-4; Lyotard, *Sublime,* 1- 50, 191-8). Aesthetics and nature share a similar "fate" in the history of philosophy: both domains are generally subsumed to the autarky of philosophy and are thus denied any meaningful existence in themselves. However, if positioned in phantasmatic confrontation with philosophy, these domains speculatively short circuit thought, forcing a consideration of logics other than those of the concept.

     If Post-Kantian Idealist-Romanticism, provides an experimental un-binding of these spheres from within their place in the Kantian architectonic, Hegel presents a provisional attempt to re-territorialize these spheres within his own organic

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[325] Crudely surmising Kant's necessary presupposition of an organic whole for the comprehension of nature, Nietzsche quips: "We need 'unities' in order to be able to reckon: that does not mean we must suppose that such unities exist" (*Will,* 338).

[326] For Kant, "the Beautiful" and "the Sublime" are not properties of art objects in themselves, but rather, things which the subject takes away from them via the (dis)harmony of the faculties in each judgment.

encyclopedia.[327] In many ways Hegel rehearses the traditional repression of these domains in favour of the freedom of the philosophical concept. However, despite their inadequacy these moments are viewed by Hegel as "reciprocally necessary moments" (or stages) in the "progressive unfolding of truth" (*PS,* 2). As with all "sublated" domains in the Hegelian system, these should not be seen as simply "overcome" once and for all, but as necessary shapes through which *Spirit* must progress "to the goal where it can lay aside the title of *love* of knowing and be *actual knowing"* (*PS,* 3). Though these lower spheres are "overcome," elements of them persist, and sometimes trouble *Geist's* higher realizations. For Hegel, *Geist* aims at becoming "absolute knowledge," or *Geist* cleansed of external relation: an overcoming of subject-object dualism via the unity of form and content, whereby philosophy, hitherto understood as a transcendental epistemology (articulating the *possibility* of knowledge), becomes ontology, which investigates the *real* conditions of knowledge as Being.

The specific spheres of nature and the aesthetic are central moments in Hegel's ongoing and contradictory dialogue with Schelling and Romanticism, and as such, should be seen as sites in which Hegel makes a sovereign decision in differentiating himself from their respective conceptions of philosophy. He contests the *Frühromantik* culmination of philosophy with aesthetics (as is exemplified in thinkers such as Schlegel and Novalis), along with the central place accorded to *Naturphilosophie* in the early Schellingian program (to 1800). In this manner, the aesthetic and nature remain central domains with which philosophy must continually tarry, part of an ongoing dialogue carried out throughout Hegel's life. In Hegel's corpus, these two sites have vexing textual histories: both are adapted from Hegel's prolific lectures on the subjects, such that the "texts" have a vibrant afterlife, filled with *Zusätze* and student annotations, such that one cannot tell where Hegel ends and his post-history begins.

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[327] Hegel conceives of philosophy as an organic and self-supporting system—in which "the whole presents itself as a circle of circles, each of which is a necessary moment" (*EL,* 39)—marking a definitive entry into the "organic paradigm" of thought. Thus, Hegel distinguishes himself from the Kantian "architectonic" understanding of philosophy (for a description of this in Kant see, *CPR,* 691-701; *CPJ, 252-55*). Both Ng (3-4) and Iversen & Melville (155-6) both underscore the importance of organic metaphors and life in the Hegelian program.

In this chapter, I speculatively experiment with an unbinding of the stable reconciliation between art, nature, and philosophy, examining the alternative (non-conceptual) logics latent in these territories, while speculating as to what an expanded form of reason might look like which seeks to incorporate, or learn from, these domains. In deciding on a different relation to these spheres, how might philosophy imagine new forms of (inter)disciplinary collaboration within the "ruined university"? The immediate motivation for these reflections comes from the late work of Adorno (specifically *Aesthetic Theory,* 1969), which undertakes a post-Idealist meta-critique of aesthetics, which it then positions in a dialogue with philosophy, utilizing art as a "prism" through which to refract and reflect upon philosophy. As I have argued in 2.3 of this dissertation *Aesthetic Theory* is not simply a minor work of art theory, but rather, a direct continuation of the program of *Negative Dialectics* (1966), attempting to think through a sensuous and embodied notion of truth, that would attempt to fulfill the preconditions Adorno lays down for philosophy after Auschwitz. Art and aesthetics provide new "ways of seeing"—to employ J. Berger's phrase (8-11, 32-33)—new models through which to organize our experience that pay greater heed to non-discursive (mimetic or sensuous) logics, while striving to relate to the natural world in a less dominating manner. Adorno's work allows the aesthetic to pose questions to philosophy, providing "a running commentary on Reason," spurning philosophy to reflect on its blind spots and downcast moments (Hammer, *Modernism,* 44). Adorno rejects both the absolute status bestowed onto art by many Romantics, along with the Hegelian subjugation of aesthetics to philosophy; instead, he opens a dialogue in which the two domains are seen on equal footing, dialectically reflecting upon each other in a negative dialectic.

Adorno repeatedly employs the motif of the "prism" to describe great works of art: they negatively refract their contemporary world through their extreme and kaleidoscopic distortions of reality. For Adorno, the works of Kafka and Beckett depict the world "as hell seen from the perspective of salvation," making visible one's "objective estrangement" (*Prisms,* 269). I wish to argue that Adorno's notion of the "prism," supplemented by Benjamin's "Idea as Monad" (*OT*, 27), can be applied to Hegel's aesthetics and philosophy of nature: viewing them as para-phenomenological or

"phantasmatological" sites of proliferation, they provide a refraction of the Hegelian program such that it can be read in new and experimental directions.

This endeavor follows those already undertaken by Rajan, who positions both nature and the history of art as a "tangle" or "indigestible remainder" with respect to Hegel's triumph of philosophy ("(In)Digestible," 217-18; "Writing," 119-121). Both domains can only be overcome by way of the "*Deus ex machina*" of the "Phoenix from the ashes," a metaphor—not logically by way of argumentation— which reveals Hegel's desperation to leave such troubling spheres behind (Rajan, "Cultural Idealism," 65). Following Schelling, nature remains an indivisible "dark ground" repressed by *Spirit*, which continually troubles it, upsetting the constitutive stability of any philosophical project. After an analysis of the contours and problematics of Hegel's philosophy of nature (6.2.1), I will examine the extent to which the Hegelian aesthetic can be read as a similarly self-troubling site with respect to the Hegelian project (6.2.2). Finally, via Adorno's dialectical image of "natural-beauty," I will speculatively unbind the domains of art and nature from within their place in Hegelian project, examining the possibility of alternative arrangements and configurations of philosophy (6.2.3).

### 6.2.1 Nature: The Alterity of Spirit

"[Knowledge of nature] must not be a simple aggregate but arranged in orders and classes, it must present itself as an organism." Hegel, *PN,* 6.

In the Introduction to his *Philosophy of Nature* (1830 [*PN*]) Hegel ambiguously glosses nature as a "riddle and a problem, whose solution both attracts and repels us: attracts us, because Spirit is presaged in Nature; repels us, because Nature seems an alien existence, in which Spirit does not find itself. That is why Aristotle said that philosophy started from wonder" (*PN,* 3). "Nature" is thought as a problematic duality: on the one hand, it represents an unconscious precursor to *Geist,* yet on the other, it manifests as an "alien existence," in which *Spirit* cannot find itself, and one is left to "wonder" at the plethora of (non-conceptual) logics latent in the material-natural world. Despite the notional complexity Hegel accords to nature, there is perhaps no more neglected site in the Hegelian corpus than Hegel's philosophy of nature, which attempts to come to terms with the "Idea in the form of otherness" (*PN,* 13*;* Furlotte, 7-9). Perhaps much of the disregard of Hegel's philosophy of nature stems from Hegel's own stated desire to

overcome—or "digest"—the ambiguous complexity of nature into the sober "freedom" of the concept (*PN,* 402; Rajan, "(In)Digestible," 217, 224). Within the Hegelian *Encyclopedia,* a philosophy of nature was to form the "second part" of the project, bookended by the *Science of Logic* (1812/13/16) and the *Philosophy of Mind* (1817/20), and would, in the Schellingian parlance, demonstrate the "real aspect" of philosophy, of which the science of logic, as a doctrine of the concept, would express the "ideal" aspect.[328] As an "absolute" Idealist, Hegel sought to move beyond the "external formalism" (*PN, 1, 274*), of subjective Idealism, seeing reason (or *Geist*) working itself out objectively (and unconsciously) in the being of nature. Hegel describes the working out of such an "absolute Idealism" as the central aim of the conceptual sojourn of his *Phenomenology,* while differentiating his approach from Kant and Spinoza (via Aristotle) respectively: "everything turns on grasping and expressing the True, not only as *Substance,* but equally as *Subject*" (*PS,* 10). This is to say, Hegel's *Bildungsroman* of the absolute commences with "consciousness" (or the "subject"), which must come to itself by way of its other ("substance")— "its self-othering with itself"—via an understanding of the "pure, simple *negativity*" conditioning both terms" (*PS,* 11).[329] Such a "circular" process, "that presupposes its end as its goal" (*PS,* 11), necessitates that the "subject" become other to itself through an encounter with the fraught dynamism of substance, that is, through a struggle with the "Idea in the form of otherness" as it presents in nature. Though "nature" is understood by Hegel as an "organic whole...totally pervaded by

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[328] In many respects, the relation between Hegelian philosophy of "*Spirit*" and that of "nature" can be thought in terms of Schelling's distinction between the "ideal" and "real" moments of philosophy. As Hegel writes in the finale to his *Philosophy of Nature*: "the aim of these lectures has been to give a picture of nature in order to subdue this Proteus: to find in this externality only the mirror of ourselves, to see in Nature a free reflex of Spirit: to know God, not in the contemplation of him as Spirit, but in his immediate existence" (445). Hegel repeatedly glosses nature as an "alterity" or "unconscious" precursor to *Spirit*; however, as with Schelling, Hegel seemingly allows nature a threatening degree of autonomy (or negativity), such that it undermines and troubles the stability of his thought—or the final triumph of *Spirit* (*PS,* 18-19; *PN,* 2).

[329] Hegel's assertions regarding "substance as [or is] subject" can be clarified in the terms of Schelling's revision of the copula, or Hegel's "speculative proposition," whereby what is aimed at is not an "identity" between the two terms, but rather a mediation by way of difference between the two moments (*FE,* 14; cf. *PS,* 36-40). Thus, one could say that "subject" articulates and defines itself by working through the complexities of "substance" (and vice versa). With respect to Aristotle, at several instances, Hegel positions Aristotle's "rational physics" (or *The Physics*) as anticipating his own philosophy of nature (*PN,* 2, 6). As Beiser notes, Aristotle provides a means to recover a notion of the "immanent teleology" of nature banished by Kant's supposed restriction of teleology to the domain of the subject (*CPJ,* 388-9).

reason" (*PN,* 11), one cannot simply grasp this whole immediately via some Spinozistic intuition. Instead, *Geist* must labour through nature's baffling biodiversity in effort to see a refracted image of itself.

Though nature manifests the Idea (of *Geist)*, it is the "Idea in the form of otherness," an "unresolved contradiction" between the drives of nature and "the Idea[s]" of the subject (*PN,* 13, 17). Hegel may eventually subsume nature to philosophy, taming the "tangle" of nature by way of the freedom of the concept, arriving at a moment in which "the rustle of Nature's life is silenced in the stillness of thought" (*PN,* 7, 444-5). But nature remains a troubling domain, "a necessary yet problematic material condition in the genesis of freedom's actualization," a phantasmatic site which "retains the ability to destabilize, even undermine, Spirit's autarkic agency" (Furlotte, 8, 9). Hegel at once laments the ever-increasing wealth of detail" which *Spirit* has to "deal with," in order to find the form of the concept which "lies concealed beneath nature's scattered and infinitely many shapes" (*PN,* 444-445); while at the same time, Hegel unrelentingly speculates down the idiosyncratic avenues of nature's burgeoning fecundity. As such, I advocate that one view the Hegelian program as a continual dialogue *with* nature. In spite of Hegel's desire to "subdue" the "Proteus" that is nature (*PN,* 445), it continues to trouble Hegel's final triumph of philosophy, and as such provides a meta-critical "prism" through which to refract the Hegelian project. Speculatively, one can read Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* as providing a "base-materialism" for new potential philosophies of *Spirit* (Rajan, "Writing," 130). One could imagine potential diseased philosophies of the absolute, which follow the accident and the plethora of detours spirit takes en route through the natural world.

In the scholarly literature, Hegel's philosophy of nature has long been the "object of ridicule and disdain," taken as evidence of a deranged "arrogant and ignorant" metaphysical thinker who denied evolution, defended Goethe's "colour theory" against Newton (*PN,* 195-217), and derived (*a priori*) the existence of seven planets (Houlgate, "Introduction," xi). In fact, following Hegel's death, his philosophy of nature was often upheld as a straw man through which to reject his philosophy wholesale as pseudo-scientific or un-falsifiable (as in, Popper, 229-82). Not only are such derisions extremely ungenerous, but they also demonstrate "a profound ignorance of Hegel's philosophy and

its relation to science and nature" (Houlgate, "Introduction," xii; Stone, xi-xvii). Hegel's philosophy of nature should be seen in a lineage commencing with Aristotle's *Physics,* which examines the ways in which nature "is," through to Leibniz, Spinoza, Schiller, Schelling, and the Kant of *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science.* Ironically, many analytic "post-Kantian" interpreters of Hegel (such as Pinkard, and Pippin) are eminently more sympathetic to Kant's speculative excesses than they are to Hegel's, generally neglecting to even consider Hegel's *Naturphilosophie.*[330] In fact, as Houlgate and Beiser have argued, such dismissals occlude the fact that Hegel could be considered the first Modern philosopher of science (in the mode of T. Kuhn and Popper), one who was exceptionally in tune with the philosophical and scientific disputes of his time. Further, Hegel does much to eradicate any substantive opposition between philosophy and the natural sciences, striving instead to think through a mode of philosophy which presupposed the natural sciences (*PN,* 10; Houlgate, "Introduction," xiii; Beiser, *Hegel,* 82). Put otherwise, Hegel thinks the distinction between philosophy and the natural sciences not as one of kind (i.e., no hard disciplinary distinction), but of degree, seeing each discipline as providing a different perspective on the same object. Reiterating his criticisms of the mere epistemology of subjective Idealism, Hegel (according to Beiser) "insisted that metaphysical questions are inevitable in the natural sciences themselves, and that a properly critical methodology would acknowledge and discuss them rather than attempt to conceal them"; thus, as Beiser goes on to argue, those (such as the Neo-Kantians) who scorn Hegel for importing metaphysics into the study of nature simply "beg the question," as this is precisely what he intended to do (Beiser, *Hegel,* 109). In this way, Hegel provides a continual reminder that "physics" (and other empirical sciences) "contains much more thought than it admits and is aware of" (*PN,* 3). And further, *Spirit,* or philosophy, must think itself *with nature*, seeing in physical processes an unconscious (or para-conscious) mode of organization.

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[330] Beiser argues emphatically against such "a reductionist or non-metaphysical reading of Hegel" [which] would attempt to limit his organic metaphysics to one part of his mature system (Part 2)." Against such deflationary positions, Beiser formulates his own holistic-metaphysical interpretation of Hegel, which accords a central place to *Naturphilosophie* within Hegel's absolute Idealist system: "For the Organic view of the world appears throughout Hegel's system. It plays a fundamental role in his logic, ethics, politics and aesthetics" (*Hegel,* 80).

Regardless of how one views Hegel's metaphysically infused considerations of nature, one must grant that Hegel opens a dialogue—hitherto unseen with the exception of Schelling—between the empirical and the transcendental moments of philosophy. Many may contend, as Alison Stone, that Hegel's interpretation of nature is a "strong a priori" reading such that philosophy articulates the conceptual frame which is merely "filled in" by *a posteriori* scientific inquiry (xii, 57-9).[331] Others argue that the empirical is able to reciprocally influence, and shape the transcendental such "that the scientific discoveries themselves condition, and perhaps even determine, the development of Hegel's conceptual account of nature" (Houlgate, "Introduction," xiv). Between these two readings is W. Furlotte, who in his *The Problem of Nature in Hegel's Final System* (2018)*,* argues for a "weak a priori" reading of Hegel's philosophy of nature. Such a model asserts a privileged position for thought as the construction of open conceptual systems, which are constantly liable to being revised by encounters with nature, the radical other of thought. It is a mode of thinking "constantly held in dialogue with experience" in which "the world...has the ability to frustrate and surprise the conceptual schemas generated by thought itself" (Furlotte, 25). Put otherwise, philosophy is positioned in a recurrent and reflexive dialogue with the (natural) world which prompts it to constantly revise its methods and concepts, in a manner akin to Adorno's "metaphysical experience." It should be emphasized that the idea of a pure "givenness" of experience, of "sense certainty"—as one would encounter it in something like twentieth-century phenomenology—is strictly denied by Hegel; in fact, it is the first thing that *Spirit* dispenses with in the *Phenomenology* (58-67; Pippin, *Shadows,* 183-216). As already noted, for Iversen & Melville, "All Hegelian beginnings are in some sense middles" (156), a sentiment echoed by Adorno's assertions that for Hegel there is no such thing as some pure "natural" beginning, there is "nothing between heaven and earth that is not mediated," one must instead commence with the "immediacy of mediation" (*Hegel,*

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[331] The term "petrified intelligence" appears in the "Introduction" to Hegel's *PN,* and is employed to describe Schelling's philosophy of nature, which Hegel appears to glosses in a sympathetic manner (*PN,* 14-15). For more on Stone's "strong a priori" view, specifically with regard to the relationship between Hegel's logic and philosophy of nature see Stone (52-55). However, as Furlotte attests, Stone's view seems to be contradicted by the plethora of empirical detail Hegel includes in the text (20-22).

57; Hegel, *SOL,* 46, 49). In this manner, any investigation into the "givenness" of nature is always already mediated by the concepts of *Spirit*: one must inquire into the disciplines which frame (and shape) one's encounters with the natural world. In his *PN*, Hegel considers several emergent scientific disciplines (notably mechanics, chemistry, galvanism), and one could imagine how such a study might commence today: how would one begin to map the plethora of scientific branches and mediations which traverse nature in the twenty-first century?

Though it is common to locate the origin of Hegel's mature system in his early encounters with religious-mysticism at both the *Tübinger Stift* and Jena, exemplified by his early essays on Christianity and its historical essence (1795-1800), a more apt origin lies in Hegel's early engagement with *Naturphilosophie,* specifically that of Schelling, which commenced in 1800 and culminating in his defense of Schelling in his 1801 *The Difference Between Fichte and Schelling's System of Philosophy* (Furlotte, 155-174; Ng, 65-76).[332] Echoing the importance for the philosophies of nature in Hegel's intellectual development, Beiser locates the presence of "ubiquitous organic metaphors throughout Hegel" such that "all of Hegel's thinking essentially proceeds from an organic vision of the world, a view of the universe as a single vast living organism" (80).[333] As Hegel himself asserts, "the perpetual action of life is Absolute Idealism" (*PN,* 274). Like Schelling's "beginning," which is continually active throughout creation, "nature" lies at the origin of the Hegelian encyclopedia, and "continued to perplex, provoke, and engage Hegel over the course of more than three decades" (Furlotte, 4). Hegel is reported to have lectured on the philosophy of nature eight times, twice in Jena (1801-8), and six times during his final Berlin period (1818-1831), testifying to the persistence of his concern

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[332] These sentiments are echoed by Ng, who underscores the importance of "life" to the entirety of the Hegelian program, specifically in relation to the *Science of Logic,* which according to her, attempts to elaborate a "logical conception of life" (3-4). For Ng, Hegel's *SOL* should be seen in line with Kant's *CPJ,* which elaborates a "critique of judgment" via an elaboration of the intimate connection between (reflective), judgment, purposiveness, and life-nature (9, 61-4). Ng, also presents a defense of Hegel as a philosopher of science (see 63).
[333] Beiser goes further, locating an organic-pantheistic pathos animating Hegel's early view of Christianity—such that *Naturphilosophie* could be seen to predate, or at least be co-constitutive with, Hegel's considerations of religion —, sentiments he likely picked up from the mystical- proto theosophical *Tübinger Stift* (Beiser, *Hegel,* 88). One can see a similar theosophical pathos in the early writings of Schelling (see Mathews, 39-64).

with issues surrounding *Naturphilosophie* (*PN*, vi; Furlotte, 4). This obstinacy of "nature" throughout Hegel's oeuvre frames Hegel's Jena years as an "indivisible remainder" which can never be fully incorporated into a final philosophy of *Spirit*, while demonstrating an important point of sovereign decision with respect to Schelling and the *Frühromantiker*. As such one can speculatively reflect upon the precise status of *Naturphilosophie* within the Hegelian program, experimentally questioning how it might be positioned otherwise, and what new philosophies of *Spirit* could arise which take nature into account.

"Nature" stands as both the origin and the goal of the Hegelian program: "Spirit is no less *before* than *after* nature ...*Spirit* just because it is the goal of Nature is *prior* to it" (*PN,* 444). Both the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic* are said to arrive at a final moment in which *Spirit* "freely discharges (*entläßt*) itself" into the world (*SOL,* 753). Spirit is thus free of "externality" or the distinction between form and content is sublated, and philosophy becomes an exercise of ontology. However, as has already been emphasized, such an arrival at nature should not be seen as the recovery of some lost immediacy, or "sense certainty." Instead, *Spirit* (supposedly already complete in itself after the *Phenomenology* and *Logic*) goes forth into the mediated immediacy of the natural world. In this way, Hegel's interrogation of "nature" is an explicit examination of the various disciplines, and conceptual discursive networks, that always already frame "nature." However, Hegel does little to explicate the precise relationship between "the Idea" (or speculative thought), and the empirical realm probed by the natural sciences. Clearly one should be able to prove *a posteriori*—via the natural sciences—what philosophy posits *a priori,* though Hegel seemingly bestows upon the empirical the ability to shape and fracture the transcendental.

The most prescient question confronting one who wishes to read Hegel *with* nature is the precise relationship between nature (or the empirical) and logic (or the transcendental). Though such a relation has been decided in various ways (by Stone and Furlotte, and Houlgate et al.), I wish to suggest that the exact relation between the two domains cannot be decided precisely within Hegel's "philosophy of nature," and as such, remains a phantasmatic site from which to trouble and critically refract the Hegelian project as a whole. Within the *PN* itself, Hegel ostensibly attempts to organize nature as a

gradual ascending series of stages, or spheres, moving from simple "mechanism" (*PN,* 28-30), up through dynamic "physics" (*PN*, 85-87) culminating in the animal "organism" (*PN,* 356, 377), along with the "disease" of which it is capable (*PN,* 428, 433). Describing nature as a progressive "series of stages," or "spheres" *(PN,* 20, 22), each of which progress upwards through various manifestations of the Idea, Hegel writes:

> Each stage is a specific realm of Nature and all appear to have independent existence. But the last is the concrete unity of all the preceding ones, just as, in general, each successive stage embodies the lower ones, but equally posits these, as its non-organic nature, over and against itself. One stage is the power of the other, and this relation is reciprocal....The eternal life of Nature consists in this: first, that the Idea displays itself in each sphere so far as it can within the finitude of that sphere, just as each drop of water provides an image of the sun, and secondly, that the Notion, through its dialectic, breaks through the limitation of this sphere, since it cannot rest content with an inadequate element, and necessarily passes over into a higher stage. (*PN*, 27)[334]

Hegel is emphatic that "Nature is, in itself, a living Whole" (*PN*, 24): nature is the progression of natural processes through various "stages" or "spheres," each of which (as in Leibniz's monads) provides a refracted image of the whole: "as each drop of water provides an image of the sun." The philosophical armature for this understanding of nature as a dynamic relation between "part and whole" comes via Hegel's refashioning of Kant's notion of "organism" (*PN,* 337; Ng, 8-12, 24-32). At first glance, Hegel may seem to repeat Schelling's presentation of nature as a *Stufenfolge* in his *First Outline,* in which nature is understood as a fraught duality between "productivity" and "product" (*FO,* 53-70). However, while Schelling wishes to test and un-work philosophy by way of the "original diremption in nature itself," Hegel attempts to move beyond the tangled fecundity of the material world, entering the free realm of *Spirit*.[335] At the *PN's* finale

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[334] Hegel's tripartite allusion relates to the three "stages" of dialectical unfolding: "in itself, "for itself," and "in and for itself." In a similar manner, elsewhere in the text Hegel writes: "Nature is, in itself, a living Whole. The movement through its stages is more precisely this: that the Idea *posits* itself as that which it is *in itself;* or what is the same thing, that it returns *into itself* [for itself] out of its immediacy and externality which is *death,* in order to be first a *living creature,* but further, to sublate this determinateness also in which it is only Life, and to give itself an existence as Spirit, which is the truth and the final goal of Nature and the genuine actuality of the Idea [in and for itself]" (*PN,* 24).

[335] The relationship of Schelling to Hegel's philosophy of nature is perhaps one of the most curious within the *PN*. At the outset of the text, Hegel laments the "charlatanism" (*PN,* 1), with which the philosophy of nature has been treated by followers of Schelling, which has led to its scholarly disrepute. Given Hegel's own intellectual debt to Schelling, and the textual similarities of their respective versions of *Naturphilosophie,* it is curious to see such scant mention of Schelling throughout the text, as Hegel's

Hegel attempts to leave behind the "diseased" waste that is nature via the image of the "Phoenix from the ashes," a desperate attempt to heal the "wounds of spirit": to ascend upwards, beyond the unending squandering of the "proteus" that is nature (*PN,* 444; Malabou, *Changing Difference,* 72-88). In this way, the entirety of Hegel's *Naturphilosophie* is itself a "sphere" contained within the broader "circle" of the philosophical encyclopedia, "in which each member has an antecedent and a successor...the Philosophy of Nature appears as only one circle in the whole" (*PN,* 2; *EL,* 39). Yet nature also presents an "accident" that is able to attain a separate "freedom" with respect to the whole which endeavors to contain it (*PS,* 18-19), a disease that contaminates the broader circle that is Hegelian thought, threatening to win autonomy for itself.

Rajan has aptly described the self-troubling, or "indigestible," character of Hegel's philosophy of nature, such that, as a member of his encyclopedia it does not simply reflect philosophy back to itself (exemplifying Hegel's "omnivorous interdisciplinary"), but rather, it "exposes philosophy to the remainders that result from its attempt to reflect itself, and reflect on itself, through its disciplinary others" ("(In)Digestible Material," 220; "Encyclopedia," 6-11). Hegel's continual presentation of the "refractory" detail of nature (*PN,* 444), coupled with his recurrent subdivision of nature into "spheres" that spiral "into infinite reflection and self-complication," repeatedly "inflect[s] scientific descriptions with a pathos that bespeaks his inability to digest nature" (Rajan, "(In)Digestible," 221, 218). Hegel's text does not present some smooth progression up the scale of phenomena, nor a logical deduction of the disciplines which frame the natural world. Instead, Hegel undertakes continual detours—many in speculative *Zusätze* —through the complexities of plants (*PN,* 303-304), the ambiguities of crystals (*PN,* 160-177), planets (*PN,* 103), eventually culminating in the triumphant negativity of "disease" (*PN,* 432). "Digestion" shares a family resemblance with "the negative" (or negativity), understood as a "self-reflexive "system of assimilation," in which *Geist* endeavors to *"*work-through," or digest alterity into itself (Rajan,

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references are generally limited to minor clarifications or insights related to electricity, magnetism, and gold and silver (*PN,* 131, 215, 251-2, 343, 386), with far greater theoretical space devoted to admittedly important figures such as Goethe (*PN,* 26-7).

"(In)Digestible," 218, 224, 229). Thus, if nature is "indigestible"—a point further emphasized by the contamination of *The Philosophy of Mind* by motifs from the philosophy of nature (*Mind,* 29-41, 65-75; Rajan, "(In)Digestible," 231-2)— it presents an important site by which to trouble and refract the Hegelian corpus as a whole: it stages the "autobiography of the encyclopedia's failure," providing "a *mise-en-abyme* of the very system of assimilation at the heart of his encyclopedia" (Rajan, "(In)Digestible," 224). In conclusion, Rajan (following G. Canguillieum), explores how one might think Hegelian "waste," or "disease" in productive or "phantasmatological" directions, opening up a subterranean underworld of possibilities for reading Hegel (*Ibid*, 232).

Echoing these sentiments, Furlotte positions nature's "brute facticity" and "radical exteriority" as disconcerting moments with respect to "spirit's autarkic agency" (35, 7-8, 9). The materiality of nature remains a persistent "indivisible remainder" with respect to philosophy, ensuring that whatever "necessity" is arrived at by way of Hegel's conceptual sojourn will be shot through with "contingency" (Furlotte, 47-8). As such, the tangle of detail that is the Hegelian natural world—the "not whole of nature" (Furlotte, 47)—traumatizes *Geist's* return to itself such that, "facile proclamations of the ensured 'triumph of spirit' become problematic, if not untenable" (Furlotte, 1).[336] Against "speculative realists" such as Meillassoux who accuse Hegel of "correlationism," a view ironically shared by many analytic Hegelians—that is,  of finding in nature a simple repetition of conceptual thought —Furlotte presents Hegelian nature as "a radical exteriority that fundamentally limits the material realization of conceptuality" (48). In Chapter 1 and 2, Furlotte provides a close reading of the first "mechanical" sphere of Hegelian nature, a domain which short-circuits Hegel's discursive ascent, demonstrating

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[336] Continuing this train of thinking, while elaborating his own naturalist-materialist interventions on the Hegelain project, Furlotte writes: "It is not that nature has a contingent element that is sublated in terms of the whole's rationality, but, instead, much more radically, it is to maintain that nature displays a fundamental contingency at its core that proves a perpetually problematic epicenter of reticent facticity that destabilizes speculative thought's demand for comprehensible and encompassing systematic necessity" (Furlotte, 47-48). Furlotte is not attempting to wholly reject the Hegelian realization of philosophy as *Spirit*, but rather, to fracture thought such that nature can be seen as **"**a necessary yet problematic material condition in the genesis of freedom's actualization" (8). In rethinking Hegelian nature (according to Furlotte), one is able to "develop a distinct sense of the fundamental materialism permeating Hegel's conception of freedom" (1), which has important political implications (for "second nature"), allowing insight into the "precise ways in which the natural register disrupts, destabilizes, and traumatizes *Sprit's* hyper-reconstructive activity in terms of a second nature" (27).

that Hegel presents "a sophisticated conceptual lexicon that allows us to think the indeterminate volatility operating at the genetic level of the natural domain" (43). That is, Hegel presents an attempt to understand (and systematize) the "abortive indeterminacies displaying minimal structuration," allowing insight into the "barren chasm of under-determination," at nature's structural level (Furlotte, 37). Nature is not a "smooth a priori" re-articulation of the "reestablished conceptual field" (Furlotte, 38), but rather, for Hegel, nature is a tangled domain which continually "bypass[es] precise conceptual boundaries" (Furlotte, 7), opening a fraught dialogue between the empirical and transcendental domains. Both Rajan and Furlotte's work demonstrates the extent to which Hegel's *Naturphilosophie* can be read "against the grain," fracturing his corpus in interesting directions, while presenting Hegel's encyclopedia as always already self-troubling, as a site which provides problematic and contradictory self- articulations or self- (re)readings.

Though Hegel is often seen as one who overcomes the "external formalism" of subjective Idealism—historicizing Kant's transcendental and unifying the "form and content" of knowledge (*PS,* 35-40)—this dialogue between empirical and transcendental moments is not adequately staged in his *Phenomenology,* which demonstrates the immanent contradictions inherent in forms of consciousness. Hegel's various "shapes of consciousness" are shown to collapse via their own *internal* inconsistencies, not from the empirical outside. It is in the *Philosophy of Nature* that a radical exchange between the empirical and the transcendental domains is staged, and as such, the *PN* can be read as a cipher to Hegel's broader epistemology (which contains metaphysical suppositions). As has already been noted, "sense certainty" or the pure empirical given is immediately dispensed with by Hegel (*PS,* 58-67); instead thought must recognize the "mediated character of all immediacy" (*SOL,* 46, 49; cf. Adorno, *Hegel,* 57-9). In Hegel, thought never encounters some pure outside or "givenness," but rather, such an outside is always already mediated by the discursive conditions through which it manifests itself.

As Rajan has argued, Hegel's journey through the various spheres of nature ("Mechanics, Physics, Organics") is also a traversal of the various disciplines (mathematics, physics, chemistry, the life sciences [biology]), which always already mediate the natural world (Rajan, "Blake, Hegel," 22). However, against Kant and

Newton, who would uphold mathematical physics as the apex of such a disciplinary progression and as providing a model for philosophy, Hegel turns to the dynamic understanding of the "organism," with its reciprocal relationship between "parts and whole," to deliver a model for philosophy (Hegel, *PN,* 356; *SOL,* 654; Ng, 24-26). Philosophy, understood as the encyclopedic ordering of various sciences (*EO,*53; *PN,* 6), "takes up the material which physics [and the other sciences] has prepared for it empirically...and reconstitutes it" according to "the notion" allowing the insights of the sciences to be ordered in relation to "an intrinsically necessary whole," or "organic totality" *(PN,* 10, 22). Thus, "the *origin* and *formation* of the Philosophy of Nature presupposes and is conditioned by empirical physics" (*PN,* 6). For Hegel (as for Schelling), any hard disciplinary distinction between philosophy and the empirical sciences is eradicated: "Physics and the Philosophy of Nature, therefore, are not distinguished from each other as perception and thought, but only by *the kind and manner of their thought;* they are both a thinking apprehension of Nature" (*PN,* 3; Beiser, *Hegel,* 82). However, this should not be taken in some "panlogicist" direction, as if Hegel were attempting to replace empirical-experimental scientific inquiry with *a priori* philosophy. Instead, the philosophy of nature should be seen as a way of philosophizing *with nature* by "organizing and systematizing the results of the empirical sciences," with the distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori* "depend[ing] entirely upon the state of our knowledge, on whether a judgment could be given a place in the system" (Beiser, *Hegel,* 108).[337] That is, the distinction between empirical and transcendental is not one of content, but one of form, with philosophy enacting a "absolutizing" of particular empirical moments.

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[337] Related to the question of "panlogicism" is the famous "Krugs Pen" objection to Hegelian-Schellingian absolute Idealism raised within Hegel's lifetime, which objects that such an absolute Idealism sets itself the impossible task of deriving the whole of contingent reality from its abstract formulations. At the outset of his *Philosophy of Nature* (*PN,* 22-24)*,* Hegel ardently refuses such a challenge, arguing that his *Naturphilosophie,* does not strive to give such an exhaustive account of the entirety of the natural world, but rather to explore its main encyclopedic contours. This is echoed in Hegel's description of his "encyclopedic" understanding of philosophy, which he differentiates from vulgar (British) attempts to bring the empirical into philosophy, thinking via "wood, iron or other materials" (*EO,*49-50, 53-4). For more on the "Krugs Pen" objection in relation to the question of contingency in Hegel's thought, see Beiser, *Hegel* (77-8).

Hegel is explicit in defining the destructive negating power of thought as a "universalizing"—akin to the romantic gesture of "poeticizing," "potentiating" (in Novalis's terms) or "absolutizing"—of particular phenomena. However, such universalizing gestures paradoxically remove humans from nature, such that it (or "she") appears "alien" or "foreign" to *Spirit*, resulting in the seeming divide between subject and object (or empirical and transcendental). As Hegel writes:

> Instead of leaving nature as she is, and taking her as she is in truth, instead of simply perceiving her, we make her into something quite different. In thinking things, we transform them into something universal; but things are singular and the *Lion as such* does not exist...for natural objects do not think, and are not presentations [*Vorstellungen*] or thoughts...The theoretical approach begins with the arrest of appetite, is disinterested, lets things exist and go on just as they are...Our intention, however, is rather to grasp, to comprehend Nature, to make her ours, so that she is not something alien and yonder...How do we, as subjects come into contact with objects? If we venture to bridge this gulf and mislead ourselves along that line and so think this Nature, we make Nature, which is an Other than we are, into an Other than she is. (*PN,* 7-8)

As a philosophical modernist, for Hegel, there will be no return to the immediacy of "first nature," "sense certainty," nor to the "lion as such": one must recognize that "the fall" from immediacy has always already occurred, and thought is condemned to alienation from nature, such that it will present as an "other," or "alien existence in which Spirit does not find itself." Though philosophy may leave nature "as a phoenix from the ashes" (*PN,* 444), it leaves in desperation, in an attempt to refract nature (negatively) from a higher sphere. As Hegel writes, "the healing of this breach [between subject and object] must be in the form of the knowing Idea, and the moments of the solution must be sought in consciousness itself" *(PN,* 9), a sentiment echoed forcefully by Adorno's refashioning of a phrase from Wagner's Parsifal: "Only the spear that inflicted the wound can heal it" (*Hegel,* 74). For Adorno, "Hegel's philosophical consciousness suffered more from the estrangement between subject and object, between consciousness and reality, than had any previous philosophical consciousness" (Adorno, *Hegel,* 74). Paradoxically, it is this mindfulness of one's conscious separation from the natural world, of the realization that there is no such thing as "givenness"—no "thing-in-itself" behind "appearances" (*PS,* 88-9)—that allows humanity to progress onward towards the freedom of the absolute (Moland, 24; cf. Pinkard, *Naturalism,* 19).

### 6.2.2  The Aesthetic: The Sensuous Experience of the Idea

"Aesthetics presents philosophy with the bill for the fact that the academic system degraded it to being a mere specialization. It demands of philosophy precisely what philosophy has neglected to do: that it extract phenomena from their existence and bring them to self-reflection; this would be the reflection of what is petrified in the sciences, not a specialized science located beyond them." Adorno, *AT*, 262.

Notwithstanding Hegel's assertions that "art, considered in its highest vocation, is and remains for us a thing of the past...it has lost for us genuine truth and life," along with the minimal space accorded to art in his Encyclopedia (*A,* 11; *Mind,* 292-7), Hegel's lectures on aesthetics provide a dynamic and under-theorized sphere of inquiry, a stage on *Geist's* journey of self-realization that can be fractured in productive directions, creating new domains and disciplines (such as art history). For Hegel, art and the corresponding practice of aesthetics provides "a specific way of expressing and representing the true," and as such it "belongs to the same province as religion and philosophy" (*A*, 91, 94, 100). Art promises nothing less than the "sensible appearance (*Scheinen*) of the Idea," a first instance of *Spirit* liberating itself from the precipitous externality of nature (*A,* 111; Moland, 23). As the first moment of "absolute spirit," art provides a means "to strip the external world of its inflexible foreignness" (*A,* 31), a mode of "social labour" (Adorno, *Hegel,* 68-9), which moves beyond the merely desiring unreflective "animal" relationship to nature, into a more "mindful" or rational-deliberative sphere of normativity (Pinkard, *Naturalism,* 80).[338] In line with the project of Modernity to which Hegel is often committed, aesthetics presents a moment in which "spirit [is] born again" (*A*, 2): emerging out of its mere latency in nature and progressing upwards through art and religion, and culminating in *Geist's* arrival at self-consciousness in philosophy. Hegel is emphatic, *Spirit's* highest realization comes by way of philosophy, which expresses, "point-blank, Freedom" (*A*, 97). However, one has to "prepare the way for a vision" that will see the "concept in everything" (*A*, 100), and such

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[338] As Hegel writes, counterposing the "practical" (unreflective) consciousness of the animal to the fraught negativity of self-consciousness which besets the human: "Animals live in peace with themselves and their surroundings, but in the spiritual nature of man duality and inner conflict burgeon, and in their contradiction he is tossed about" (*A*, 97). This sentiment is echoed in the *Phenomenology,* where Hegel describes the animal as "teaching the truth of sensuous things" (*PS,* 65), through its practical engagement with the natural world, a perspective of "sense certainty" immediately denied to the human. Much more remains to be said regarding the question of the animal in Hegel's work, specifically the co-determination (or identity-in-difference) of animal consciousness in relation to human consciousness, or "mindfulness" (Pinkard, *Naturalism,* 19).

a preparation is undertaken via a memorial sojourn through the "passed" proto-conceptual realms of "art and religion," spheres which provide *Geist* with its *Bildung* such that it may become conscious of itself while self-actualizing in projects of freedom (*Mind,* 292-302). Though such pre-philosophical domains are "sublated," or overcome, they nonetheless serve as fundamental "vehicles for the self-realization of *Geist*" (Taylor, *Hegel,* 465). In this way, Hegel's aesthetics is Janus-faced: in one sense, looking forward in anticipation of philosophy, while at the same time, looking backward, lingering over the supra-fecund history of art, its various detours and proliferations as it seeks "the adequate embodiment of the Idea" (*A,* 77).

At first glance, Hegel's theses on art appear to be Eurocentric and dismissive of the philosophical relevance of art and aesthetics. Within Hegel's encyclopedia, art is downgraded as a "lower" level of *Spirit's* self-consciousness (Iversen & Melville, 3): yet another instance of the common "fate of art" throughout the western tradition, a repetition of the "subordination thesis" in which art is derided as being a "confused perception," an inferior medium of truth compared to the free clarity of conceptual philosophy (Beiser, *Hegel,* 286-91; Bernstein, *Fate,* 1-5).[339] Following Plato's condemnation of art as a sophistical exercise of imitation, art (and aesthetics) are banished from meaningful philosophical discussions of "truth and morality" (Bernstein, *Fate,* 3; Sontag, "Interpretation," 95-7).

Against this, one hears of Hegel as a passionate devotee of the arts and all things beautiful: one who allegedly raced through his Berlin lectures so as to dash across the street to the theatre, one who continually traveled based on his own artistic *Bildung*, and seemingly never encountered an aesthetic object he did not appreciate (Pinkard, *Hegel,* 594-5, 507-14; Beiser, *Hegel,* 282). Further, at key junctures in his *Phenomenology of*

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[339] Describing the "subsumption thesis," in which art is considered a subordinate form of thought to philosophy, Beiser will write, "what art glimpses through the obscure medium of the senses philosophy captures through the transparent medium of thought" (*Hegel,* 283). Iversen & Melville note that despite Hegel generally favoring Western art forms and patronizingly deriding Eastern forms of art as naively "abstract," Hegel was also one of the first to consider eastern forms of art (and aesthetics) in a systematic manner (2-3): a sentiment which Rajan echoes by positioning Hegel's method as providing the transcendental conditions for A. Riegl and W. Worringer's re-evaluation and legitimation of Egyptian art ("Cultural Idealism," 63-5). Further, within the general context of the Hegelian encyclopedia, in which art as a whole is an alterity to conceptual clarity "there is no form of art that properly speaking is not foreign" (Rajan, "Writing," 120).

*Spirit*—itself an artistic achievement rivaling the *Bildungsromane* of his age— Hegel turns to art to elucidate the historical-consciousness of a certain "shape of consciousness." One will recall his remarkable discussions of *Antigone,* which illustrates the emergent tensions between the individual and society of the Greek "ethical order" (*PS,* 261, 284-91), through to his employment of Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew,* which is read to depict the strife of "culture" in post-revolutionary France (*PS,* 318, 332), and the culmination of the *PS* with the (mis-)quotation of a passage by Schiller (*PS,* 493). The *Werkausgabe* edition of Hegel's lectures on Aesthetics totals 1500 pages (with Knox's two volume English rendition totaling 1237), more than the *Encyclopedia* project in total, with the first half of the *Aesthetics* surveying the historical genesis of art as it passes through seemingly every culture, with the second half charting the multiplicity and variation of the specific arts (architecture, sculpture, etc.). A great amount of historical detritus, only to be overcome: "Why... write a three-volume work [on the arts] if they are inferior to philosophy and doomed to obsolescence?" (Beiser, *Hegel,* 283).

Despite Hegel's seeming dismissal of art in favour of the more refined realm of the concept, art provides a speculative sphere through which to refract and imagine the Hegelian project differently. As will be argued via Adorno, those who wish to trouble the final triumph of conceptual philosophy—while maintaining a Hegelian notion of system or encyclopedic conception of philosophy—would do well to consult the plethora of alternative logics contained in the "lesser" stages of "absolute spirit" aesthetics and perhaps even religion. These domains can be thought as "prisms" through which to reflect on Hegelian philosophy, and upon more general questions related to the philosophical system. This "freedom" of art is reminiscent of Schelling's statements regarding an individual "member" (*FE,* 18) that is able to gain "an autonomy" with respect to the whole; or with Hegel, a circle (or sphere) which becomes "detached from what circumscribes it" and "attains an existence of its own...[a] separate freedom" (*PS,* 18-19). There exist monadological "worlds within worlds" hidden in the Hegelian program, whole disciplines and novel speculative logics waiting to be unearthed. As in Schelling's *Naturphilosophie,* one encounters dual trajectories in nature, one upwardly organizing, the other ceaselessly proliferating via continual detours. For Hegel, though *Geist* progresses upwards towards "the absolute," one continually encounters

"indigestible moments" of ceaseless proliferation, an excess of detail, and "lingering," or "tarrying," as *Geist* attempts to incorporate all alterity into itself. Within Hegel's considerations of aesthetics, one encounters a "daunting array of detail" (Moland, 3; cf. *PN,* 444), to an almost excessive extent, posing serious hurdles for a philosophy which wishes to come back to itself in any stable "rational" manner.

From the perspective of the encyclopedia, aesthetics, as a reckoning with the concept of "beauty," seeks the "appearance of the Idea to sense" (*A*, 111), promising the "sensuous experience of truth" (Moland, 2). Aesthetics provides a preliminary "intuition" (*Anschauung*) of "absolute spirit," only to be surpassed by the more refined forms of representations (*Vorstellungen*) of religion and the rational clarity of the philosophical concept (*Begriffe*) (Moland, 23). Within the particular sphere of the aesthetics, the various forms of art ("symbolic, classical, and romantic") provide formal genre markers which describe "different ways of grasping the Idea as content...differing relations of meaning and shape, relations which proceed from the Idea itself and therefore provide the true basis for the division of this sphere" (*A,* 77, 75). As forms of "concrete universality," each Idea provides a representation of "the whole," which organizes and mediates the individual moments or particular artistic objects and practices (Beiser, *Hegel,* 289-90). Likening this methodological aesthetic organization to Hegel's "phenomenology" of the various shapes of consciousness, Rajan describes Hegel's *Aesthetics* as "a phenomenology of art not only in the traditional sense of trying to grasp the spirit behind the individual forms, but also the more contemporary sense of considering forms in terms of their effect on the reader" (Rajan, *Supplement,* 52). In such a manner, one sees in Hegel's aesthetics the emergence of a new distinctly "modern" sentiment towards art, a movement away from Kant, such that the work of art "is not an autonomous structure" but is created instead "for a public" (Rajan, *Supplement,* 52), and, as such, should be read in relation to a constellation of material-historical forces.

In the progression of absolute spirit (through art, religion and philosophy), one will note Hegel's standard tripartite dialectical structure of development. This is mirrored in the evolution of art through its various "stages": from the pantheistic revelries of "the symbolic," through art's "end" with the "adequate embodiment" of the idea in "the classical" Greek world, and finally art's return and proliferation via many "romantic"

manifestations (*A,* 76-9). However, Rajan has drawn attention to the negative (or "inverted") dialectic at work in Hegel's progression through the phases of art: "the form of the aesthetics [is] a disturbed dialectic where synthesis is displaced from the end to the middle of history, as if speaking properly cannot exhaust thoughts aims" (Rajan, "Writing," 126, 122-3). That is, though art seemingly ends in the free clarity of "the classical"—a clear homology with conceptual philosophical thought—art continues in the "romantic" phase, as if to provide a meta-critique on the dogmatism of lucid conceptual thinking. Hegel performs Adorno's assertions regarding the unintentional truth of philosophical language: "all philosophical language is a language in opposition to language, marked with the stigma of its own impossibility" (Adorno, *Hegel,* 100). In this way, Hegel's three artistic moments can be seen as meta-critical prisms that are involved in "a perpetual supplementation and rethinking of each other": "classicism represents thought as finished" while "the symbolic and romantic differently un-work [philosophy] by circulating thought between its necessary and always premature hypostasis (in the symbolic), and withdrawing thought as Spirit from the concepts that limit it so as to think it once again" (Rajan, "Writing," 142).

The first "symbolic" phase of art is associated with the pantheism of pre-Greek non-Western art (*A,* 77), and presents the Idea "in its indeterminacy and obscurity" (*A,* 76). In such a sphere art proliferates—and the Idea "bubbles and ferments in [works], does violence to them, distorts them and stretches them unnaturally... indeterminate[ly]" (*A,* 76)— manifesting as a prose of the world that is unable to grasp the Idea other than through "abstract characteristics," wallowing in a "bad and untrue determinacy" (*A,* 76).[340] Such "bizarre, grotesque, and tasteless" propagation is overcome by the "classical" phase of art, which presents the "free and adequate embodiment of the idea" over and against the "double defects" of the "abstract" determinations of the symbolic (*A,*

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[340] Rajan (in "Cultural Idealism") has charted the "difference and opposition" (65) that lies at the heart of the Hegelian symbolic phase of art (along with its return in the Romantic): notably the positivity Hegel accords to Persian and Indian art, in tension with their sublime negativity (63-5). Such tensions cast doubt on the possibility of a formative aesthetic education (*Bildung*), which would culminate in some clarified notion of "freedom," ensuring a logical transition to philosophy (66-7). Elsewhere, Rajan locates the symbolic in a constellation with J. Boehme, and Hegel's larger troubled relationship with pantheism, domains which gain a separate freedom and are able to critically estrange one from the Hegelian program ("Writing," 127-30).

77). The classical work of art is expressed in the world of Greek statue, in which the highest ideals of society came to be personified in sensuous (often human) form, culminating in the "unity" of form and content so striven for by Hegel (*A,* 78). Art thus "ends," with this coming to (self-) consciousness of itself as a unified practice, along its central role in Greek spiritual-political life. However, such a becoming plastic of the gods has the unintended consequence of eradicating the distinction between sacred and profane, begetting its own negation in the "inwardness of self-consciousness" endemic to the "romantic" era (*A,* 80-1), which "cancels again the completed unification of the Idea and its reality and reverts...in a higher way, to that difference and opposition of the two sides" (*A,* 79; cf. Iversen & Melville, 162, 6). For Hegel, the Romantic-Modern era corresponded to the dominance of a (Christian-protestant) subjective individuality, and one cannot return to the lost unities of antiquity, or what Lukács termed the age of the "epic" (*Novel,* 29-40). In the romantic era, art seems to once again propagate along idiosyncratic paths (as in the symbolic), though never again will it attain the "adequacy" it once had within the Greek world, as meaning and shape are severed from each other in the alienated condition of modern life (*A,* 81). Hegel's dissatisfaction with Romantic art arises from the new place of prominence Hegel accords to philosophy. Given that (in Modernity) the world has become "rational," a comprehension of modern life must necessarily come from the rational form of life, conceptual philosophy.

Iversen and Melville locate art history—understood as the critical-discursive presentation and analysis of art—as emerging in an "intimate dialogue with Hegel and post-Hegelian thought" (specifically, H. Wöllfin, A. Riegl, A. Warburg and E. Panofsky, [2]). That is, art history is a particular moment which escapes and ruptures the restricted economy of the Hegelian system. As the historical "origin" of art history, Hegel provides a means to think art history methodologically as a practice of "writing," a much needed palliative to the current (Kantian-Panofskyian) crisis of the discipline (2-3).[341] In the

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[341] Iversen & Melville attribute the decline of methodological reflection in art history to the dominance of Panofsky and his Kantian infused "disinterested" method of contemplation, in which works of art are evaluated by way of (supposedly) neutral spectatorship, providing little awareness of the complex of mediations subtending every aesthetic experience. Thus, Iversen & Melville (re)turn to Hegel—specifically his methodological critique of Kant—as a means to renew disciplinary questions of method, following after Hegel's destruction of any hard distinction between "method and content." Via Hegel, Iversen & Melville

epistemological domain, Hegel is seen as one who overcomes Kantian "subjective Idealism," by locating "reason" in a broader set of domains. Likewise, with respect to art, Hegel moves aesthetics beyond the confines of the Kantian judging subject, considering "reason" in the aesthetic realm in a broader manner, anticipating the later disciplines of art history or cultural studies (Schulte-Sasse, 85-9). Hegel's 1820-9 *Lectures on Fine Arts,* held predominantly at the newly formed *Humboldt Universität* in Berlin, represent the emergence of new distinctly modern relationship to art, one emerging out of a unique constellation of questions regarding the museum and its role in centralizing "national" knowledge (Iversen & Melville, 151).

Hegel moves beyond the narrow parameters of the Kantian aesthetic (of the *CPJ*), which considered fine art a "dependent" [*anhängende*] mode of the beautiful in comparison to the "free beauties" of nature; as such, Kant saw art as a mere occasion for the judgments of the epistemic subject (*CPJ,* 114-116; cf. Hegel, *A*, 2; Adorno, *AT,* 63). Hegel, like many others in his Idealist-Romantic generation, elevated art to a form of thought in its own right, granting a primacy to the aesthetic object, while eviscerating any hard distinction between method and content in the analysis of art, such that "Art history happens, and matters, as writing" (Iversen & Melville, 3). However, against Kant, who accords nature primacy, Hegel upsets the preeminence of nature in the aesthetic domain, triumphantly favoring fine art at the expense of the "beauty of nature" (*A,* 116-129; *Mind*, 558; Moland, 33). As will be demonstrated via Adorno, in this instance Hegel is both true and false: in one sense providing a radically "modern" model for aesthetics, while on the other, representing another instance of the suppression of art and aesthetics by Western philosophy, which favors the clarity of the concept at the expense of other more sensuous logics.

In these ways, I wish to suggest that the "fate of art" in Hegel's philosophy cannot be settled simply—in fact, it is not settled amicably even within Hegel's corpus—as aesthetics provides a plethora of "prisms" through which philosophy is able to be reflected upon: "present[ing] philosophy with the bill" (Adorno, *AT,* 262). Bernstein

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speculatively question "what other shape could art history have?" (2), how can one employ the resources of the Hegelian encyclopedia to write art history differently?

argues that although Kant participated in the general subjugation of art (and the aesthetic) to philosophy, his work also provides an abundance of models through which to think the aesthetic in novel new relations (*Fate,* 17-18). I wish to argue that this is likewise the case with Hegel, and perhaps even to a greater degree. Hegelian aesthetics, along with the tradition of post-Hegelian aesthetic theory (which culminates in Adorno), provides dynamic models by which to open a constructive exchange between philosophy and the aesthetic, providing new "meta-critical" domains through which to reflect on both spheres. As Rajan writes, "If philosophy does not supersede art, then perhaps one can ask whether the *Aesthetics,* rather than being a philosophy, or history of art, might not also be thought of as an art of philosophy" ("Writing," 141). In such a manner, Hegel can aid in the theorization of new arts of philosophy, providing new possible plastic models of thought.

### 6.2.3 Art's Necrology: Post-Hegelian Art and Aesthetics

"We may well hope that art will always rise higher and come to perfection, but the form of art has ceased to be the supreme need of the Spirit. No matter how excellent we find the statues of the Greek gods, no matter how we see God the Father, Christ, and Mary so estimably and perfectly portrayed; it is no help; we bow the knee no longer [before artistic portrayals]." Hegel, *A,* 103.

There is no more infamous moment in Hegelian aesthetics than his assertions regarding "the death of art," which, "as a thing of the past," no longer provides normative directives for the rationalized context of Modernity (*A,* 103). Against many in his Romantic-Idealist generation (notably Schiller, the Schlegels, Schleiermacher, and to some extent Schelling), for Hegel, art will not play the cumulative role of unifying the divergent strivings of Modern life as it did in the Greek "classical age," or in medieval Christianity. Instead, in Modernity such a task is reserved for the rational conceptualizations of philosophy, with art providing an educative preface for "free" conceptual thought. It should be clarified, Hegel is not asserting that art should be abandoned wholesale, nor that the art of his contemporaries is wholly irrelevant, but rather, that art no longer responds to the fundamental needs (and tensions) of modern society: "it is of no help" (*A,* 103). Art is unable to provide a model of "the whole" that will address the fragmentation of modern life. Anticipating Baudelaire, for Hegel, there will be no "painter of modern life"; instead, art becomes "a latecomer on its own scene"

(Iversen & Melville, 172): "It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore" (*Adorno, AT,* 1, cf. 3-4). At the moment of its "modern" emergence, it is already too late— *"une passante"* (Baudelaire, *Fleurs,* 127). Hence art can only be treated as a "thing of the past," which can be historically interrogated through the conceptual methods of aesthetics and art history.[342] That is, despite the presence of other logics, or modes of relating to the world contained within art, its fate in Modernity is that its "truth" will always be articulated discursively via the conceptual "prose" of philosophy. Art becomes its own "necrology" (Adorno, *AT,* 4): a specter living on after its objective historical dissolution, haunting the supposedly rational unities of Modernity. As Adorno ardently proclaims, "Hegel was the first to realize that the end of art is implicit in its concept" (*AT,* 32).

Many thinkers and artists have simply cast off Hegel's assertions as another problematic modern "meta-narrative" which must be disregarded, and much of the art which followed Hegel's death has forcefully put his declarations to the test.[343] Among Hegel's challengers a unique place should be accorded to "post-Hegelian" aesthetic theory: a tradition which emerges in the work of Simmel and Lukács, and is continued actively by Benjamin, culminating in Adorno.[344] This constellation of thinkers should be considered "post-Hegelian" not in the sense of rejecting Hegel (or his aesthetics)

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[342] As Rajan asserts, "to write the history of a domain in Hegel's sense is to bring this domain into modernity, given that modernity is the overcoming of the past, its sublation or re-description in present terms" ("Writing," 140). In this manner, art history entails a conceptual re-description of the sensuous logic of art in conceptual terms (as aesthetics).

[343] Clearly there have been meaningful artistic advancements since Hegel's proclamation, along with notable advances in reproductive technology (namely photography and film), which have fundamentally altered the status of art. Iversen & Melville refashion Hegel's "end of art," to imagine other possible endings for art in the twentieth-century, such as Duchamp, or Warhol, while also examining how artists such as Donald Judd challenge Hegel's degradation of certain mediums, such as sculpture or architecture (154). One can see Benjamin as contesting Hegel's death of art from the perspectives of film and photography, and Adorno contesting Hegel's proclamations from the domain of music, contestations about which more remains to be said.

[344] Both Lukács and Simmel conceptualize culture—and "forms" of art—from a broadly Hegelian perspective. Simmel sees "culture" in dialectical terms as the dialectical interaction between "individual" (or subject) and "society" (object). According to Simmel, within Modernity, culture takes on a tragic form as the objective world of convention comes to dominate the individual (see "On the Concept and the Tragedy of Culture," 55-74, cf. "The Conflict of Modern Culture," 75-89). For Lukács, culture should be understood as a dialectic between "soul and form," in which individual aesthetic forms (such as the novel) can be read as ciphers to broader historical trajectories. For example, Lukács locates the development of the novel in relation to the broader movement towards "individualism" in culture (*Novel,* 11-28, 70-96).

wholesale, but rather, as immanently working through his central concepts, imagining alternative uses and employments of Hegelian encyclopedic thinking. That is, they demonstrate the possibility of "thinking philosophy's labour of the negative through art," theorizing the possibility of "non-classical modes of art and aesthetics" (Rajan, "Writing," 121), and perhaps of philosophy as well.

In his *Aesthetic Theory,* Adorno engages in a meta-critique of Idealist aesthetics, performing deconstructions which pave the way for his own critical interventions upon philosophy more broadly. As has been argued elsewhere in this project, Adorno's aesthetics stages a critical confrontation between Kantian and Hegelian aesthetics, examining the critical possibilities latent in each thinker (2.3). Via this doublet Adorno forwards his own modernist understanding of art as a vestige of "mimesis," providing the means to think a more expansive model of rationality that would do justice to particularity, "suffering," and the natural world (*ND,* 17-18; *AT,* 61-72, 343; Hammer, *Modernism,* 42-44, 57). Adorno's attempt to combine (without definitive synthesis) the aesthetic comportments of Hegel alongside those of Kant mirrors his broader negative dialectical philosophical project, which strives to merge the epistemic modesty of the Kantian subject with a Hegelian encyclopedic-historic understanding of philosophy.[345]

Such a return to art and aesthetics marks Adorno's dissatisfaction with Hegelian notions of "freedom," specifically, Hegel's culmination of philosophy with the "identity" of the concept, and his leaving behind other, non-discursive ways of relating to the world. For Adorno, Hegelian rationality came to fruition as an instrumental logic of domination, an "iron cage" suffocating all of nature and humanity. The Hegelian thought of freedom had become too "calculative and instrumental, too responsive to our desire for self-preservation... an impediment to the actualization of freedom rather than an expression of it" (Hammer, *Modernism,* 50, 35-6). However, art, as a moment in the realization of "absolute spirit," provides a provisional manifestation of the whole, and in a context of instrumental domination offers a vestige for other logics and alternative relations to the

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[345] Adorno describes the need to redeem "through second reflection" (*AT,* 343) the (aesthetic) programs of Kant and Hegel: "If the most powerful aesthetics—Kant's and Hegel's—were the fruits of systematic thinking, the collapse of these systems has thrown them into confusion without, however, destroying them" (*AT,* 353).

world. Adorno's early Kierkegaard study (1933)—subtitled "The Construction of the Aesthetic"—redeems the aesthetic sphere in both Kierkegaard and Hegel as a voluptuous site of potential meaning, a realm of natural-historical ciphers which can be critically read (3-23). Through dialectical images such as "natural beauty," Adorno explores new "forms of significance and ways of mattering that are not immediately dependent on rationally shaped commitments" (Hammer, *Modernism,* 50). Following Adorno, one must envision a negative dialectical interaction between philosophy and the aesthetic, one which does not eradicate the difference in favour of the final triumph of philosophy (as Hegel tries to do), but rather, one in which art and its non-discursive elements are granted "a continuing stake in imagining this [rational] unity" (Iversen & Melville, 159). Adorno elevates the Hegelian aesthetic as a phantasmatic site through which to refract Hegelian philosophy, providing a "running commentary on reason" (Hammer, *Modernism,* 44), while envisioning new expansive and meta-critical models of rationality. If Adorno contests the culmination of *Geist's* progression in conceptual philosophy—continually arguing that the supposed "freedom" of the concept is in fact a triumph of instrumental reason—art (as a lower form of absolute spirit) provides an alternative model of "freedom," a site through which to imagine differing relationships between philosophy and the natural world. The following section will explore Adorno's constellation of "natural beauty," positioning it as exemplary of Adorno's own immanent expansion of the Hegelian project, an intervention which demonstrates the possibility of further critical projects relating to the Hegelian aesthetic domain.

### 6.2.3.1  Natural Beauty

"The concept of natural beauty rubs on a wound, and little is needed to prompt one to associate this word with the violence that the artwork—a pure artifact—inflicts on nature. Wholly artificial, the artwork seems to be the pure opposite of what is not made, nature. As pure antithesis however, each refers to the other: nature to the experience of a mediated and objectified world, the artwork to nature as the mediated plenipotentiary of immediacy. Therefore, reflection on natural beauty is irrevocably requisite to the theory of art." Adorno, *AT,* 62.

Central to Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* is the reclamation of "natural beauty," which Adorno reads as a "dialectical image," or "prism," through which to deconstruct Hegelian aesthetics, while also providing an occasion for Adorno to forward his own aesthetically infused model of philosophy. The notion of natural beauty, or the "free

beauty of nature," is unconsciously central to Kant's *CPJ* (114-116)*,* though it was "repressed" wholesale (*AT,* 61) by the post-Kantian Idealist tradition of aesthetics, with the possible exception of Schelling and Goethe (*AT,* 72). For Adorno, such a repression of the natural is a cipher to the broader "fallacy of constitutive subjectivity" endemic to Idealism: the privileging of the mind and notions of unity and identity over and against the multiplicities of the natural world, or what Adorno terms "the object" (*ND,* xx, 183-97). Adorno broadly glosses Idealism in terms of the belief that "nothing in the world is worthy of attention except that for which the autonomous subject has itself to thank" *(AT,* 62).[346] It should be emphasized that in recovering "natural beauty" Adorno is not after some auratic pure immediacy; for him, natural beauty "is historical through and through" (*AT,* 65): it is a constellation in which "natural and historical elements interact in a musical and kaleidoscopically changing fashion" (*AT,* 71). Thus, natural beauty—along with nature more generally—is a dialectical cipher to certain material historical trajectories: "Natural beauty is the trace of the non-identical under the spell of universal identity" (*AT*, 73; Hammer, *Modernism,* 53). That is to say, the "wounds" of nature testify to the domination of capitalist-enlightenment "identity- thinking," with natural beauty refracting a memorial image of a world without domination. In the *DE,* Adorno and Horkheimer describe this possibility of reading enlightenment history negatively, or natural-historically, from the perspective of nature: "A philosophical interpretation of world history would have to show how...the systematic domination over nature has been asserted more and more decisively and has integrated all human characteristics. Economic, political and cultural forms would have to be derived from this position" (185; cf. *ND,*11-67).

As has been emphasized, for Adorno, Hegel is both right and wrong: in one sense Hegelian Idealism provides the dialectical armature through which Adorno will theorize

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[346] As Adorno continues, "Perhaps nowhere else is the desiccation of everything not totally ruled by the subject more apparent [than in aesthetics], nowhere else is the dark shadow of Idealism more obvious, than in aesthetics," which posits art as the "tumbling mat" of "the true, the beautiful, the good" (*AT,* 62). For Adorno, such a primacy of the subject results in the oppression of "animal, landscape, woman" (*AT,* 63), moments left behind by the imperialism of the concept. In a similar manner, Hammer asserts, For Hegel "mere Nature plays no direct role in the autonomous subject's self-affirmation and self-authorization" (*Modernism,* 48).

his own historical critical understanding of philosophy, while in another sense, Hegel participates in the conventional Idealist domination of particular "non-identity" by way of conceptual "identity" (*ND,* 24-28). With respect to aesthetics, though Adorno endorses Hegel's movement of aesthetics away from the subjectivity of Kantian judgment (*AT,* 41), he also wishes to maintain elements of Kantian aesthetics, notably (natural) beauty and sublimity, along with mimesis, which Hegel summarily dismisses (*AT,* 75; Hammer, *Modernism,* 50). This negative dialectical mediation of Hegelian and Kantian aesthetics together in a mosaic of tension gestures at Adorno's broader attempt to reconcile Kant and Hegel: specifically, the epistemic finitude of the Kantian subject, within the historical encyclopedic framework of Hegel. With respect to aesthetics, Adorno experimentally criticizes Hegel(ian aesthetics) primarily from the perspective of "nature"—that "mediated plenipotentiary of immediacy" (*AT,* 62)—forwarding "natural beauty" as a "prism" through which to refract the Hegelian program in speculative  ways.[347] If for Hegel, art is a provisional manifestation of freedom, for Adorno, works of art are situated "natural historically" at the intersection of nature and culture, and are thus able to challenge our quotidian assumption, "proposing a different relation to nature altogether" (Hammer, *Modernism* 63).[348]

Hegel, with a "polemical eye towards Schelling," inaugurated the problematic paradigm of "discursive aesthetics" which "casts natural beauty as more impoverished than it is" (*AT,* 74). Such a discursive-aesthetic paradigm did not allow "nature" to be seen in its own right, but only by way of its other philosophy (via conceptual discursive aesthetics, the written practice of art history): as Hegel writes, "the beauty of nature is beautiful only for another...for us, for the mind which apprehends beauty" (Hegel, *A,* 123; Adorno, *AT,* 74). Illustrative of this, in his lectures on aesthetics (*A,* 116-123, 143-152*)*

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[347] Describing a potential parallelism between the downcast moments of art and nature in Hegel's philosophy, Adorno will write: "It can be argued immanently against Hegel that his own definition of nature as Spirit in its otherness not only contrasts Spirit with nature but also binds them together without, however, the binding element being investigated in his system's aesthetics or philosophy of nature" (*AT,* 75). Adorno extents this immanent critique into the domain of Hegelian aesthetics, arguing that, **"**Hegel arrests the aesthetic dialectic by his static definitions of the beautiful as the sensual appearance of the Idea" (*AT,* 51).
[348] As I demonstrated in 2.3, for Adorno, art presents a utopian model of social labour, a mode of relating to "the object" in a non-dominating fashion.

Hegel overcomes, without the conventional remainders of *Aufhebung,* the concept of natural beauty "when it has scarcely been introduced": the beauty of nature is downgraded as an "indeterminate," merely "subjective sentiment," which has been overcome by the cultivated culture of "fine art" (*AT,* 74-5, 76). Throughout his discussion of the "symbolic" phase of art, Hegel makes similar disparaging remarks regarding the naturalistic pantheism pervading "Eastern art," symptomatic of what Adorno terms the "Idealist disdain for what is not Spirit in nature" (*AT,* 75). For Adorno, such denunciations betray the fundamental dialectical-historical promise of Hegelian thought: in "rejecting the fleetingness of natural beauty, Hegel obtusely makes himself indifferent to the central motif of art, which probes after truth in the evanescent and fragile" (*AT,* 76). Hegel gazes at transience throughout his aesthetics, though he represses such evanescence in favor of the clarity of the philosophical concept. Though Adorno is highly critical of Hegel's degradation of natural beauty, he also reads such a subjugation as historically emblematic of Idealist philosophy's more general repression of nature: "Natural beauty gains legitimacy only by its decline" (*AT,* 76); that is, the beauty of fine art becomes possible only after the protean tangle of "nature" has been subdued and categorized.

As Adorno argues, "natural-beauty," if dialectically interrogated provides "the unexpected promise of something that is highest," a monument to a utopian impulse "more than what is literally there," sublimely transcending the subject and forcing it to "shudder," recognizing logics other than itself (*AT,* 75, 70). Here Adorno moves Hegel in a Schellingian direction—despite Adorno's assertions of the "irretrievable" character of the experience of nature presented in Goethe and Schelling (*AT,* 72)— positing natural beauty as fracturing the stability of thought by way of the dynamism of nature. Adorno endorses a negative inversion of Schelling's relationship between nature and aesthetics— by which aesthetic genius participates in the ur-productivity of nature (*STI,* 219-236*)*— for Adorno, it is via the complete withdrawal from nature, through the total embrace of their constructed and mediated character that art works dialectically present an image of reconciled nature (*Prisms,* 250; cf. *NL I:* 19). In a further move, Adorno argues that it is Kant (specifically of the *CPJ*) who provides the theoretical means to bring nature back into (aesthetic) thought, exhibiting a polyphony of inventive models by which the subject

is able to relate to the world (*AT,* 10-18, 64-70, 116, 245). As has been argued, in the *CPJ* though Kant positions the beauty of nature as superior to that of "fine art," he also provides several pioneering thought models through which philosophy can rethink its interaction with the natural world (*CPJ,* 178; Hammer, *Modernism,* 50).

Central to Adorno's aesthetics is the primordial "shudder" evoked by aesthetic experience, a notion which has evident parallels with the Kantian sublime in that both shatter any stable parallelism between the subject and the world, opening the subject to its constitutive finitude, figuring a "noumenal subject [that] can be considered fragile and mortal" (*AT,* 245-6, 67, 66). That is, the sublime contains the potential to reconnect the subject with transcendence, with a "something more" that challenges its concepts and categories. (Adorno & Bloch, 10-17). If in Kant, natural beauty and the teleological whole of nature demonstrate the subject as fitting into the world (providing "a whole" based on its ideas and categories), Adorno shows the primordial heterogeneity of subject and object, a "not feeling at home," which "challenges and upsets the subject in its normal capacity for experience" (Hammer, *Modernism,* 65). For Adorno, one must remain within Lukácsian "transcendental homelessness," enduring the "abyss" opened by the discordance between soul and form (*Novel,* 29-39). Adorno is also critical of Kant's monumental presentation of the sublime—in which the "infinitely great" one experiences in nature points to the even greater moral capacity within the subject— reading it as emblematic of the bourgeois domination of nature, the taming of the natural world via discursive cognition and the evaluation of its processes according to anthropocentric categories. As Adorno writes, "If nature is to be beautiful, it is because we are no longer threatened by it" (*AT*, 65): there can be no spectatorship without domination (Hammer, *Modernism,* 52), without the subjugation of the tangled complexity of the natural world.

As Hammer and Bernstein both emphasize, for Adorno, the aesthetic provides models by which to open the "buffered self" of Modernity, ways of "(re) connecting the modern subject or self with an order beyond it" (Bernstein, *Fate,* 8), while creating a "different and more receptive form of subjectivity, thereby challenging the "buffered

self" of modern reason" (Hammer, *Modernism,* 57).[349] Hence the centrality of notions such as mimesis, along with the experience of "semblance," to Adorno's aesthetics, sites in which the subject is able to encounter non-discursive logics and alternative ways of relating to the world. Great works of art evoke "a shudder," or a "loss of the ground" (*AT,* 245, 220-4), exposing the subject to its own naturalistic genesis, charting its emergence and mimetic ur-receptivity in relation to the natural world (Hammer, *Modernism,* 63-4).

In evoking such a primordial "experience of transcendence" (Bernstein, *Fate,* 220), or in recognizing the "object's primacy," Adorno upholds the anti-foundationalism of the Kantian subject within a Hegelian framework, (negative) dialectically mediating the two by way of identity-in-difference. Following Hegel, Adorno is eminently modern: one cannot go back to pure natural landscapes, either in art or reality, but rather, one must seek to negatively refract "the guarded image of first nature" from within "second nature," or the realm of fine art: "In semblance, non-semblance is promised" (*AT,* 63; cf. *ND,* 404-5). As Adorno writes, "Authentic artworks, which hold fast to the idea of reconciliation with nature by making themselves completely a second nature, have consistently felt the urge, as if in need of a breath of fresh air, to step outside of themselves" (*AT,* 63). As Adorno continues, "Art is not nature, but art does want to keep nature's promise" (*AT,* 65). Through art's self-negation, or total identification with its made status, art keeps the promise of a reconciled vision of humanity. Art refracts the possibility of a (natural) world without domination: "Art stands in for nature through its abolition in effigy" (*AT,* 66).[350] "Nature" does not yet exist, though art holds its possibility open (*AT,* 74). The negativity, or dissonance, of such experiences are essential, as Adorno is not after some sublime "hero worship," but rather, a feeling for

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[349] Hammer employs Charles Taylor's distinction between the "buffered" self of Cartesian subject-object dualism that pervades much of modern philosophy. Taylor contrasts such a view with the "porous" notion of the self developed by the Idealists (see, Taylor, *The Secular Age,* 38-41, 131-5; cf. Hammer, *Modernism,* 57-9).

[350] Adorno continues, arguing that art holds open the promise for a fuller notion of "rationality": "So long as progress, deformed by utilitarianism, does violence to the surface of the earth. Rationalization is not yet rational; the universality of mediation has yet to be transferred into living life; and this endows the traces of immediacy, however dubious and antiquated, with an element of concrete justice" (*AT,* 64). Art does justice to "nature" by expressing the violence done to nature by way of thought: "consciousness does justice to the experience of nature only when, like impressionist art, it incorporates nature's wounds" (*AT,* 68). Even pessimistic art becomes rational in relation to the dissonance of reality: "the darkening of the world makes the irrationality of art rational; radically darkened art" (*AT,* 19).

nature's "silence" (*AT,* 69). Nature's transcendence lies not only in the grand experiences of the breathtaking greatness of landscapes, but more often in the sublime stillness of nature's solitude. In a Benjaminian manner, Adorno tasks art-aesthetics with the impossible task of making the "muteness" of nature articulate, which paradoxically necessitates the self-negation of art: "If the language of nature is mute, art seeks to make this muteness eloquent; art thus exposes itself to failure through the insurmountable contradiction between the idea of making the mute eloquent, which demands a desperate effort, and the idea of what this effort would amount to, the idea of what cannot in any way be willed" (*AT,* 78).[351] In this way, the "impossible possibility" of aesthetics—one mirrored in Adorno's philosophy— its failure to meaningfully "say" anything, presents a negative image of the reconciliation with nature: a transient figuration of "being, nothing else, without any further definition and fulfillment" (*MM,* 157). Art, along with the critical practice of aesthetics, strives "with human means...to realize the language of what is not human" (*AT,* 78). Such practices provide ephemeral "fireworks" (*AT,* 28, 81), which figure transient outlines of utopia, holding out for the "impossible possibility" of redemption. For Adorno, both the production and reception of works of art figure the possibility of other non-discursive modes of relating to the world. As a mode of "labour," art shows that humans can shape and aid in the unfolding of nature in a productive non-oppressive manner (*AT,* 77). Adorno's interrogation of "natural-beauty" in relation to Hegelian aesthetics demonstrates the vast storehouse of critical possibilities within the Hegelian project, and the plastic character of the Hegelian corpus more generally. Adorno extracts a transient truth content from the Hegelian corpus, seeing him as one "who does not have the absolute at his command," though one who survives as a ruin (*CM,* 7). As Adorno reminds us, "even those philosophers whose doctrines insist on the eternal and timeless acquired [via historical critique] their temporal nucleus, their historical status" (*CM*, 8).

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[351] Describing the almost messianic promise of the work of art, Adorno will write, **"The being-in-itself to which artworks are devoted is not the imitation of something real but rather the anticipation of a being-in-itself that does not yet exist, of an unknown that—by way of the subject—is self-determining. Artworks say that something exists in itself, without predicating anything about it"** (*AT,* 77).

What further phantasmatic sites lie waiting to be unearthed within the Hegelian program? As a self-fracturing thinker, Hegel provides immanent thought models through which one may read his system against itself. Domains such as the aesthetic and nature can be employed as "prisms" through which to refract the Hegelian program, reading his oeuvre "against the grain" in the creation of new speculative models of Idealism, models which resist the definitive closure of discursive philosophy. More remains to be said regarding these domains, and one could imagine similar projects which take up the immense detail in Hegel's philosophy of history, religion, or his politics, examining the fraught dialogue at work between thought and contingent empirical-historical moments. Hegel's ruined encyclopedia, along with the fraught duality of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie,* provide an excess of models by which to understand new possible relationships with the world, and perhaps to ourselves, and as such, it remains continually efficacious for our contemporary constellations of issues.

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Happy are those ages when the starry sky is the map of all possible paths—ages whose paths are illuminated by the light of the stars. Everything in such ages is new and yet familiar, full of adventure and yet their own. The world is wide and yet it is like a home, for the fire that burns in the soul is of the same essential nature as the stars; the world and the self, the light and the fire, are sharply distinct, yet they never become permeant strangers to one another, for fire is the soul of all light and all fire clothes itself in light... 'Philosophy is really homesickness,' says Novalis: it is the urge to be at home everywhere.

Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel,* 29.

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**Publications**

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