The Sociology of THEODOR ADORNO

MATTHIAS BENZER

CAMBRIDGE

The Sociology of Theodor Adorno

Theodor Adorno is a widely studied figure, but most often with regard to his work on cultural theory, philosophy and aesthetics. *The Sociology of Theodor Adorno* provides the first thorough English language account of Adorno's sociological thinking. Matthias Benzer reads Adorno's sociol ogy through six major themes: the problem of conceptualising capitalist society; empirical research; theoretical analysis; social critique; the socio logical text; and the question of the non social. Benzer explains the methodological and theoretical ideas informing Adorno's reflections on sociology and illustrates Adorno's approach to examining social life, including astrology, sexual taboos and racial prejudice. Benzer clarifies Adorno's sociology in relation to his work in other disciplines and the inspiration his sociology took from social thinkers such as Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Kracauer and Benjamin. The book raises critical questions about the viability of Adorno's sociological mode of procedure and its potential contributions and challenges to current debates in social science.

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Tokyo, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press,
New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107000094

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First published 2011

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data
Benzer, Matthias, 1980
The sociology of Theodor Adorno / Matthias Benzer.
p. cm.
ISBN 978 1 107 00009 4 (hardback)
1. Adorno, Theodor W., 1903 1969. 2. Sociology. I. Title.
HM585.B467 2011
301.092 dc22

2010044891

ISBN 978 1 107 00009 4 Hardback

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Dedicated to Nigel Dodd

There is an immense force in saying No,
and sometimes it seems to me that it is so great
that one could live on it alone.

Elias Canetti

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Acknowledgements

This book is based on doctoral research conducted over several years under the supervision of Dr Nigel Dodd at the London School of Economics. It has benefited from an ongoing dialogue with Gwyneth Hawkins, critical comments by two anonymous referees and Juljan Krause's advice. My doctoral examiners, Professor David Frisby, who has sadly passed away, and Dr Graeme Gilloch, provided generous guidance for developing this publication. My undergraduate students on SOCY30011: Tiller Girls and Terrorists, at the University of Manchester helped me understand how Adorno's sociology might be discussed with an interested audience. James Thomas provided invaluable editorial support. I am grateful to Professor Bridget Hutter at the LSE and Professor Nick Crossley at the University of Manchester for granting me the time to finish the manuscript. For their company over the years, I thank Mark Ready, whose presence will not be forgotten, Steve Van Riel, Ming-Whey Lee, Al Glascott, Christopher Knapp and Klaus Frick. *Ein herzliches Dankeschön* to my parents Marianne and Werner Benzer and to my sister Judith for their support. My gratitude to Jenni Benzer is beyond words. All mistakes are mine.

Some of my thoughts, materials and formulations on the social dimension of concepts and on social critique in Chapters 3 and 4 have been published in the paper 'Social Critique in the Totally Socialised Society', *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 37/5 by Sage Publications Ltd, All rights reserved. © SAGE Publications Ltd, 2011. It is available at: online.sagepub.com/

Abbreviations for frequently cited texts

AE	*Against Epistemology* (Adorno 1982)
AP	*The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno *et al.* 1950)
A&B	*The Complete Correspondence 1928–1940* (Adorno and Benjamin 1994)
A&H1, A&H2, A&H4	Vols. I, II and IV of *Briefwechsel 1927–1969* (Adorno and Horkheimer 2003, 2004, 2006)
A&K	*‚Der Riß der Welt geht auch durch mich . . .'* (Adorno and Kracauer 2008)
CLA	*Can One Live after Auschwitz?* (Adorno 2003a)
CM	*Critical Models* (Adorno 1998b)
CoM	*Current of Music* (Adorno 2009a)
DE	*Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002)
GEX	*Gruppenexperiment* (Adorno and Dirks 1955)
GS1, GS2 etc.	Vols. 1, 2 etc. of *Gesammelte Schriften* (Adorno 2003b)
HF	*History and Freedom* (Adorno 2006a)
HTS	*Hegel* (Adorno 1993b)
INH	'The Idea of Natural-History' (Adorno 2006b)
IS	*Introduction to Sociology* (Adorno 2000a)
ISW	'Ist Soziologie eine Wissenschaft vom Menschen?' (Adorno and Gehlen [1965] 1974)
JA	*The Jargon of Authenticity* (Adorno 1973a)
MCP	*Metaphysics* (Adorno 2000b)
MM	*Minima Moralia* (Adorno 1978)
ND	*Negative Dialectics* (Adorno 2001; since this is an unpaginated online translation of Adorno 1996, page numbers refer to the latter German version)

NLI, NLII	Vols. I and II of *Notes to Literature* (Adorno 1991b, 1992b)
OL	*Ohne Leitbild*, in *Gesammelte Schriften,* vol. 10.1 (Adorno 2003b)
P	*Prisms* (Adorno 1983)
PD	*The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology* (Adorno *et al*. 1976)
PETG	*Philosophische Elemente einer Theorie der Gesellschaft* (Adorno 2008)
PTI, PTII	Vols. I and II of *Philosophische Terminologie* (Adorno 1973b, 1974)
S	'Society' (Adorno 1969a)
SDE	*The Stars Down to Earth and Other Essays on the Irrational in Culture* (Adorno 2002b)
SoI	*Spätkapitalismus oder Industriegesellschaft?* (Adorno 1969b)
SP1, SP2	'Sociology and Psychology' and 'Sociology and Psychology II' (Adorno 1967, 1968)
SSI	Vol. I of *Soziologische Schriften*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 8 (Adorno 2003b)
VSI, VSII	Vols. I and II of *Vermischte Schriften*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vols. 20.1 and 20.2 (Adorno 2003b)

Translations of German sources are mine. English translations have been modified as appropriate.

Introduction

The Sociology of Theodor Adorno reads like an anachronistic title for a book. This is not because the ink of Adorno's last written word dried four decades ago. Many disciplines, notably philosophy and aesthetics, still cite his *oeuvre* as a timely source. It is Adorno's *sociology* that seems so far out of touch with basic trends in contemporary social science as to no longer warrant attention. Adorno conceived sociology as a demarcated discipline insofar as 'there are specifically sociological methods and ... questions' (IS 99) and insisted that this discipline required a concept of society. These convictions appear to clash head-on with present-day ideas for sociology's cross- or post-disciplinarity (Urry 2000a: 199–200; 2003: 124), its reunification with other disciplines as twenty-first-century historical science (Wallerstein 2000: 33–4) and its abandonment of the concept of society.[1] At first glance, Adorno's sociology promises little more than reactionary obstacles for the discipline's advance into the new millennium.

But the issue is not so straightforward. Adorno's sociology resonates consonantly with some of these developments. He never considered sociology as a conventional academic subject. Notwithstanding the specificity of sociological questions and methods, he assigned no defined, defining substantive field to them (IS 102). Adorno even deplored the 'moats' separating 'scientific ... disciplines', which swallowed their 'essential interest' (IS 140), and deemed the exclusion of 'economic questions' about society's 'process of production and reproduction' particularly precarious (SSI 504). Adorno conducted no sociological study without pushing or crossing sociology's boundaries. What he refused to rely on was the intellectual's ability to erase or ignore socially enforced disciplinary discriminations purely by dint of a resolution to do so (GS6 524, MM 21). Adorno's work also raises no objections to present critiques of the concept of society as sociology's central category, if what is at issue is the concept of

[1] Outhwaite (2006: 17 53) criticises this trend.

the nation state (e.g. Beck 2000; Urry 2000b). His concept of society was that of capitalist exchange society. And even this concept, Adorno held, mainly created trouble for sociology. It is just that he understood conceptual problems as expressions of social problems and therefore rejected the relinquishment of the concept of society as all too swift an attempt to silence material predicaments calling for analysis.

The matter is further complicated by the word ‘anachronistic’. Its etymology reveals ‘against time’. What makes a thought timely might well relate to its reconcilability with the present, its conservatism, whereas an untimely ring may tell of a thought’s refusal to subscribe to the present, of intellectual resistance to perpetuating an outmoded status quo and to its suggestions for reform. Benjamin’s notion of ‘anachronism in the better sense’, as made explicit in a 1934 letter to Adorno, points in this direction. Its meaning is not to ‘galvanize the past’ but to ‘anticipate a . . . future’ (A&B 34). It is possible that precisely those dimensions of Adorno’s sociology that tend against time raise challenges to the discipline’s present which are progressively unconventional. The dissonant aspects of Adorno’s work would then be especially relevant today, while references to the ‘passage of time’ (Adorno 1973c: 219) in place of a serious engagement with those aspects would amount to dodging compelling controversies. In 1999, Becker-Schmidt (1999: 104) observed that Adorno’s ‘instructions on self-reflection in the social sciences . . . threaten[ed] to be forgotten’. A decade later, reminding sociology of his challenges will mean remembering many of them as obstacles in the discipline’s way out of the 1900s. But not even a dialectical reading can make ‘forgotten’ synonymous with ‘mastered’. In search of a path into the twenty-first century, the discipline might wish to take a fresh look at the sociology of Theodor Adorno after all.

Adorno’s sociology of society

The primary objective of this book is to provide an inclusive, detailed account of Adorno’s sociology. It focuses on his views on the potentials and problems of a sociology that seeks to examine capitalist exchange society. The book discusses Adorno’s sociology of society. This formulation is not born of a desire to hurl provocations into current debates on the cross-, inter-, multi- or post-disciplinary future of a socio-scientific project unburdened from the concept of society. It is suggested by two aspects of Adorno’s work.

Attending to Adorno’s concept of exchange society is conducive to any foray into his *oeuvre*. Adorno is convinced that thinking has only concepts at its disposal. Inquiring into a salient concept thus constitutes one

strategic approach to his work. As Adorno's shorthand indicators – titles – reveal, 'society' is such a concept. In addition to two pieces entitled 'Society' (an unusual encyclopaedia entry and a chapter in *Aesthetic Theory*), Adorno published 'On the Social Situation of Music', 'On Lyric Poetry and Society', 'Freedom and Organised Society', 'Opinion Delusion Society' and 'Culture-Critique and Society', to name a few. A title, Adorno explains, is 'the microcosm of the work' (NLII 4). The titles listed underline the importance of 'society' in many areas of his thinking, including philosophy, aesthetics and sociology. Spanning almost his entire career, they also indicate the concept's recurrence in his writings. Finally, the titles highlight interrelations between 'society' and other categories germane to Adorno's work, suggesting that discussions of 'society' will inevitably involve other key concepts. However, the analytical difficulties associated with what Adorno's concept of society intends are as noteworthy as the concept's relevance. Among these is society's resistance to definition, its frustrating elusiveness to the concept's grasp. The predicaments pertaining to the concept of society repeatedly raise the question of how society can be examined. Adorno puts this question to sociology.

To sociology, Adorno argues, the concept of society is 'central'. It is not central as a universal summary classifier for all social life or as sociology's fundamental explanatory category (IS 26–9). The concept of society is sociologically central insofar as sociology can*not* examine anything *without* it. There is, Adorno argues, 'nothing . . . on earth' that 'is not mediated by society' (IS 64–5); 'nothing under the sun' (IS 15) in which society does not assert or manifest itself; nothing that is not characterised by it. This is partly why sociology lacks a specifically demarcated field of study by which the discipline could be defined. Society's omnipresence means that 'sociology' involves 'reflection upon social moments within any given area of subject matter' (IS 102–3) – upon the ways in which exchange society affects individual phenomena. Thus Adorno suggests the formulation 'sociology of society' for his project (although he never used it).

The following six chapters elucidate a spectrum of themes which decisively shape Adorno's perspectives on the problems and potentials of a sociology endeavouring to examine exchange society. The chapter sequence does not lead from the less to the more complex, nor does it accumulate towards a systematic, complete sociological methodology. Adorno denies the possibility of a step-by-step approach to sociology as passionately (IS 4–7) as he denies that of finally determining the discipline and its concept of society (IS 28–9, 103). No intellectual endeavour seriously concerned with the recalcitrant reality of the present, he suspects, can first deal with the simple, then with the complicated, and eventually achieve a universal overview (NLI 14–17). Although the

themes of this book are essential to its general topic, they do not exhaust the matter at hand. The chapter sequence seems conducive to letting the themes illuminate each other.

Chapter 1 follows Adorno's naïve student (NLI 14) and reaches for the difficult: the antagonistic present itself. It discusses Adorno's concept of exchange society, addresses the issue of selecting resourceful sociological research phenomena and introduces his ideas for their interpretation. The selection of research phenomena is closely related to the question of sociological material. Chapter 2 explores the complex, multifaceted empirical dimension of Adorno's sociology.

'Adorno does not just set out to *describe* the world', writes Thomson (2006: 3), 'he wishes to break open . . . appearances and show how things really are'. Ostensibly 'historical arguments' are 'speculative rather than sociological'. This view of sociology is curiously monochrome – as if sociologists were unconcerned with reality, occupied only with describing appearances. For Adorno, theoretical analyses of factual appearances are a necessity precisely for sociology. Chapter 3 explores his understanding of the indispensability, role, problems and potentials of theory in sociological examinations of society. Such examinations, Adorno insists, pursue a critique of society. Chapter 4 investigates his views on sociology's socio-critical dimension, in which the suffering body plays a privileged role. The question whether social critique compels sociology to inform transformative praxis arises in this context.

Chapter 5 discusses Adorno's perspectives on the difficulties and possibilities of writing a sociological text; of articulating – beyond mere identification – what determines social life in exchange society. The final chapter addresses two questions raised by Adorno's sociological vision: Are there any traces of the world that have eluded exchange society? Is it still possible to experience them? Adorno's response is framed in respect of the subject's relationship with elements of a non-social reality. The intersections between his sociology and his thoughts on metaphysics surfacing in Chapter 6 generate fresh insights into both areas of his work.

Recurrent motif

In a 1968 undergraduate sociology lecture, Adorno seemed to reveal in a few expeditious sentences what he thought 'sociology should actually be' – only to ask his audience 'not to write down and take home what I have told you as a definition of sociology'. His entire thinking, Adorno explains, is critical of definitional concepts devoted to 'organiz[ing]' reality (IS 15). He shuns offering sociologists a *Spruch* – literally 'dictum' or 'maxim', and used by Adorno also for 'principle', 'doctrine' (NLII 143)

or 'a minimum ... of axioms' and 'prefabricated categories' (ND 24) – to define their discipline. In Adorno's work, one will neither find a set of general categories encompassing the concepts and arguments in his sociological thinking, nor a fundamental principle which serves as their basis.

Adorno's sociological writings contain a persistently recurrent motif: the double character of sociology. This motif emerges in relation to several of the themes guiding his sociological thought. Adorno's sociology pursues not only certain empirical, theoretical, critical, political and textual objectives. Examinations of exchange society must also meet two further aims, which are irreducible to one another and sometimes in conflict. Due to the complexity of this issue, it cannot be summarised in an introductory sentence (for a brief remark, see also Rose 1978: 78). However, it is possible to indicate that the paradoxical aspect of a solidified capitalist society, seemingly operating above the heads of humans, which is nonetheless maintained by nobody but these humans, raises a twofold demand on sociology. In response to this demand, the discipline develops its double character. Since this demand emerges in different forms in Adorno's sociological thinking, and since many domains are enlisted to meet it in its various manifestations, the double character of sociology makes itself felt in different guises in a range of thematic and sub-thematic areas.

Given that the double character of sociology falls significantly short of characterising *all* the thematic and sub-thematic areas of Adorno's sociological thinking, it cannot be treated as an umbrella category for them. Given that this motif provides no foundation for all the concepts and arguments in the different thematic domains, it cannot be taken as their basic principle. Some empirical, theoretical and political aspects of Adorno's sociology are not decisively related to its double character at all. Yet the recurrence of this motif does make it especially important for understanding his vision for the discipline. Sociology's double character constitutes an often-interrupted substantive red thread in this book. The motif will be investigated whenever it materialises. This renders some repetition unavoidable. Its varied reappearance in different dimensions of Adorno's writings suggests that the double character of sociology is a motif in variation which needs to be illuminated in its diverse guises.[2]

Approaching Adorno

Adorno's work is notoriously difficult. His reasoning is unconventional and multifarious; his dense writing can 'seem obscure, impenetrable, and

[2] Paddison (1993: 20) aims to present key ideas in Adorno's musicology as 'variations on a theme'.

forbidding' (Thomson 2006: 1). Clarifying Adorno's sociological thought depends on expository investigations and analytical discussions of the concepts, conceptual interrelations and arguments informing his perspectives on each of the six themes as well as on scrutinising the connections between these themes. In her study of Baudrillard, Grace (2000: 1) describes her strategy as 'refin[ing] . . . one's understanding of . . . concepts . . . in light of their repeated appearance' throughout an *oeuvre*. Adorno's work is read 'from the inside', as Paddison (2004: viii) puts it, 'where ideas and concepts are seen as working as ensembles within the texts'.

Yet the potential of expository analysis is limited. On withdrawing his interim definition of sociology from his students, Adorno adds: 'what sociology . . . is . . . or has to be . . . can only happen in that one just does it' (IS 15). The ways in which 'significant theorists' conduct social research are more important than their programmatic statements of intentions (PETG 17). Many of Adorno's views on sociology's questions and methods are linked to his studies of particular aspects of social life. Most of his sociological writings contain both elements (although nowhere are they in equilibrium). Adorno's ideas for sociology were meant as guidance for specific research projects, but were in turn also inspired by, and modified in light of, his experiences with them. This creates the requirement to illustrate the concepts and arguments informing his perspectives on each sociological theme with reference to his examinations of particular social phenomena in exchange society.

Adorno's social research projects threaten to be misunderstood unless they are embedded in the wider context of his ideas for sociology. Simultaneously, his warnings of the problems facing sociological inquiries into exchange society – warnings regularly driven by epistemologico-critical interventions – are often too abstract to immediately reveal their implications for research practice. By homing in on the manifestations of such problems in his research projects, it is possible to make these implications transparent. Likewise, Adorno's perspective on sociology's potential to examine exchange society only becomes fully apparent in those of his studies that aim to realise this potential. Adorno's biographer and former student, Claussen (2003b: 140), remembers his professor frequently signalling to students: 'What I am doing here, you can do too.' I have tried to pick up and amplify such signals in this book.

In contrast to Plass's (2007) fine account of Adorno's *Notes to Literature* or Witkin's (2003) discussion of his critique of the culture industry, the chapters of this book do not concentrate on one or a few central texts respectively. Each chapter brings together material from across Adorno's work. The focus rests on his more narrowly conceived sociological writings. This bibliographical orientation may seem odd. Adorno produced

no single-authored book with 'specifically sociological content' in his lifetime (Tiedemann in GS9.2 404). Nevertheless, Adorno's output comprises a vast range of sociological writings: analyses of sociology's empirical, theoretical, socio-critical and textual dimensions; discussions of its relationship with other disciplines; inquiries into sociological concepts; critiques of rival sociologists; debates on exchange society; and sociological studies of individual social phenomena. Many of these texts have been collected in three posthumously edited tomes of *Sociological Writings* (GS9.1, GS9.2, SSI). Moreover, Adorno's collected writings now include the transcripts of two 1960s sociology lecture series (IS, PETG). Several further contributions to sociology can be found in his collections of *Critical Models* (CM), in *Miscellanea* (VSI, VSII), *Prisms* (P), *Minima Moralia* (MM) and in uncollected texts. Finally, Adorno was involved in two collective sociological research projects, *The Authoritarian Personality* (AP) and *Group Experiment* (GEX), and worked extensively in the sociology of art, music and the culture industry (e.g. CoM, NLI, NLII, SDE, 1976). Most of these writings contain ideas informing Adorno's vision for sociological examinations of exchange society and thus support the expositions of this book. For illustrations I chose texts chiefly representing such examinations with reference to specific social phenomena. The aim in this context is not an exhaustive summary of Adorno's sociological case studies. I turn to these studies to illustrate Adorno's vision for sociology. The analysis of individual studies, with a view to how they are guided by that vision, unearths aspects which are not obvious if they are read in isolation. In this specific sense, the illustrative sections also seek to clarify Adorno's sociological case studies and to help readers deepen their own engagement with them.

According to Sherratt (2002: 9), Adorno's interpreters provide 'little exploration of the systematic connection between ideas from discrete areas', even though 'transgressive operations' were cardinal for his thinking (Plass 2007: 11).[3] The claim that only interdisciplinary studies of Adorno's work can be successful would be nonsense. However, without also venturing beyond his sociological writings, it may be unfeasible to produce a satisfactory analysis of his thoughts on the problems and potentials of a sociology examining exchange society. Adorno certainly recognises the division of intellectual labour between disciplines, which, being socially dictated, cannot simply be eliminated by rebellious individuals. Hence 'isolating [his] specific contributions to discrete areas of

[3] Numerous commentaries explore several discrete areas of his work, although perhaps not always their 'systematic' connections (Bernstein 2001; Jarvis 1998; Jay 1984a; Rose 1978; Tar 1977).

inquiry' is 'at least partly defensible' (Jay 1984a: 87). Adorno's insistence on specific questions and methods underlines this for sociology. Yet Adorno seeks to push the boundaries between disciplines and deems himself sometimes successful at crossing them (CM 216, ND 141–2, PTI 79–80). This results in numerous interconnections between his sociology and other fields – e.g. philosophy, psychology or aesthetics – which are helpful, at times vital, for gaining clarity on his sociological thought.

Adorno's work took inspiration from a range of intellectual sources. He combined strong reservations against 'unbridled speculation' void of content (HTS 65, see also AE 42–3) with the conviction that intellectual productions could provide such content: for agreement, further development, transformation, criticism or dismissal. Moreover, from an early age, Adorno was close to other twentieth-century thinkers, some of whom – notably fellow affiliates of Frankfurt's Institute for Social Research – he eventually collaborated with. Finally, as Nicholsen (in HTS xvii) underlines, Adorno was a teacher seeking to 'pass on . . . tools of thought' that would 'enable' others to 'analys[e] . . . the world'. Engaging with Adorno's intellectual sources is often indispensable precisely for understanding his sociological thought from the inside: for clarifying the concepts, conceptual interrelations and arguments shaping his perspective on the six themes as well as for enhancing the illustrations of these concepts and arguments.

The process of selecting from Adorno's sources those most relevant for this book was guided by the aim of clarifying his sociological thought. Emphasising Adorno's relationship with one or more intellectual traditions is not a specific objective of this study. This is not to deny the relevance of such work. In the debate over Adorno's reading of Marx, Jameson's (1990) defence of Adorno's Marxism offers an important intervention (see also Pizer 1993). Similarly, Sherratt's (2002) discussion of Adorno's Freudian heritage and O'Connor's (2004) study of Adorno's critique of idealism provide original and valuable perspectives. Yet when the primary aim of analysing the sedimentation of intellectual sources in Adorno's concepts is to accentuate his concepts' concord with, or opposition to, a particular tradition, it is likely that his sources from this tradition will receive the most attention. By contrast, when the primary aim of tracing sources is to elucidate the various concepts and arguments shaping Adorno's ideas for sociology, the focus of the analysis must be on the most important sources, respectively, for those concepts and those arguments. The focus constantly shifts, because the most important sources remain neither the same nor of the same kind in each instance.

Three spheres of Adorno's work provide directions for identifying his sources and evaluating their impact. Firstly, there are leads in Adorno's

own writings. This is not a trivial point; following these leads does not constitute a straightforward journey from reference to source. Adorno, encouraged by his publisher, was a bibliographical ascetic, who habitually omitted references (Tiedemann in GS10.2 821). Many passages offer the reader only allusions that someone else's work is at issue and it is often unclear what work it is. Secondly, Adorno's *oeuvre* contains writings explicitly dedicated to other thinkers: appraisals of Kracauer, Benjamin and Horkheimer; immanent critiques of Husserl and Hegel; engagements with Durkheim, Lukács, Veblen, Mannheim and 'positivist' sociology – etc. In some cases, e.g. Adorno's reading of Benjamin, investigating Adorno's sources raises as many questions as it answers. Where extended responses to such questions remain beyond the scope of the following chapters, the questions might stimulate further explorations. Finally, it has been instructive to consult texts characteristic of groups of intellectuals, such as Adorno and his interlocutors, who were separated by exile and thus denied face-to-face discussion: written correspondences. Not only do these 'workshops of ... thoughts' (Claussen 2003a: 22) offer striking insights into the crystallisation of some of Adorno's ideas and arguments; they also help in organising, pinpointing and evaluating his intellectual sources.

Held's (1980: 14) well-known study of the Frankfurt School places 'emphasis ... on an interpretation and elaboration of ... ideas'. Held finds a treatment of themes more conducive to this objective than a chronological or intellectual-historical account. For the same reason, my inquiry into Adorno's sociology is thematically organised. Held also concedes that a sustained interpretation of ideas 'cannot entirely escape intellectual history or chronological documentation'. Although no chapter in this book is chronologically organised, selected subsections deal with certain issues in loose chronology, especially where tracing temporal variations in Adorno's thinking is important for clarifying a theme. (For a chronological overview of his sociological *oeuvre*, see the Appendix.)

My approach to the historical context of Adorno's thinking – its biographical, political and social backdrop – is similarly pragmatic. This is partly justified by the large number of accounts of Adorno's life and of the socio-political background of the Frankfurt School's activities, which have left little of his work's historical context unexplored.[4] Moreover, where the main objective has been historical contextualisation, the interpretation of Adorno's ideas has sometimes suffered. Jameson (1990: 4) observes

[4] See Brunkhorst 1999: 11 68; Buck Morss 1977: 1 23; Claussen 2008; Held 1980: 29 39; Jäger 2004; Jay 1984a: 24 55; 1996; Müller Doohm 2009; Pabst 2003; Rubin 2002; Schütte 2003; Slater 1977; Steinert 2003; Wiggershaus 1987, 1994; Wilcock 1996, 1997.

that accounting for 'Adorno's career in various stages, including as its obligatory backdrop the exciting wartime flights across Europe and North America, and the postwar return to a Germany in rubble (with the subsequent emergence of a student movement in the sixties), done in the various appropriate Hollywood and Tv-docudrama styles . . . has generally ignored the philosophical or aesthetic' – and, I hasten to add, sociological – 'components'.[5] Jameson is exaggerating, but not without underlining the dilemma that biographically and historically oriented accounts almost inevitably lack detailed discussions of Adorno's concepts and arguments.

Still, some aspects of Adorno's thinking were so profoundly influenced by his experiences of specific biographical, political, historical and social events that to ignore his views on these events would frustrate conceptual clarification. Auschwitz forced itself upon several areas of Adorno's work; political developments in postwar Germany shaped his critique of collective activism; and his travelogues – albeit misunderstood if merely read as biographical snippets – bear a characteristic personal dimension. Adorno's own work, his intellectual sources, the correspondences and the existing biographical and historical literature provide guidance for assessing the impact of historical context in specific instances.

Adorno commentaries

In the twenty-first-century Anglophone world, Adorno remains one of the most widely debated twentieth-century European thinkers. The growing number of introductory and multidisciplinary accounts of Adorno's work[6] and a series of broader surveys and intellectual histories of the Frankfurt School and European Marxism[7] illustrate this. Yet in the past two decades, Anglophone scholars have tended towards a greater concern with Adorno's contributions to specific disciplines. Several sophisticated studies are dedicated to Adorno's aesthetics (Hullot-Kentor 2006; Nicholsen 1997; Zuidervaart 1991), some focusing on musicology (Paddison 1993; Witkin 1998) and literature (Cunningham and Mapp 2006; Plass 2007). Adorno's writings have also been scrutinised with a view to philosophical questions (Hearfield 2004; Jameson 1990). Specialist commentaries deal with epistemology (O'Connor 2004; Sherratt 2002), metaphysics (Pensky 1997; Rosiek 2000; Wellmer 2000: 183–202), social philosophy

[5] Usually, three stages are covered: Weimar Germany and interwar Austria up to 1933, English and American exile (1934 51), and Adorno's life in the young Federal Republic of (West) Germany (1951 69).

[6] Brunkhorst 1999; Buck Morss 1977; Hohendahl 1995; Jarvis 1998; Jay 1984a; Rose 1978; Thomson 2006; Wilson 2007.

[7] Held 1980; Jay 1996; Kellner 1989; Lunn 1982; Slater 1977; Tar 1977; Wiggershaus 1994.

(Cook 2004a; Zuidervaart 2007), ethics (Bernstein 2001), the concept of life (Morgan 2007), existentialism (Sherman 2007) and the notion of mimesis (Schultz 1990). Finally, the literature now contains discussions of Adorno's significance for feminist theory (Heberle 2006; Lee 2005; O'Neill 1999) and political thought (Hammer 2006; Offe 2005).

Adorno's ideas for sociological research and its methodology have received less sustained attention. Cook's outstanding works on the culture industry (1996) and on Adorno's and Habermas's social philosophies (2004a) are partly based on close readings of some of Adorno's key sociological writings. Cavalletto (2007: 127–71) provides a case study of Adorno's inquiry into fascist rhetoric, tackling methodological, epistemological and substantive questions. Jenemann's (2007) book on Adorno's encounters with American culture during his exile years explores some of the issues raised by his sociology of the culture industry in its intellectual-historical context. Other English-language discussions of Adorno's views on sociology can be found in chapters in multidisciplinary accounts (Held 1980: 163–74; Jay 1984a: 82–110; Rose 1978: 77–108) and in journal articles and readers.[8]

Scholars dealing with Adorno's philosophy and aesthetics have given perfectly good reasons for exploring his thinking in these areas. Their works are instructive, engaging and challenging. Yet despite the recent 'boom' (Gibson and Rubin 2002: 1–2) in the English-speaking Adorno literature, a case for further investigations can be made. Thomson's (2006: 2) formulation that 'Adorno is often presented ... as some species of sociologist' does not capture the thematic focus of most English-language Adorno commentaries and articulates the requirement to clarify Adorno's challenges to the discipline with precision. The following six chapters seek to contribute to the Anglophone Adorno literature in three respects: substantively, in that they aim for a sustained analysis of Adorno's vision for, and work in, sociology; bibliographically, in that they focus on his sociological writings; and with regards to Adorno's intellectual sources, in that the relationship between his sociological thought and the works of other sociologists will be examined.[9]

[8] Several Adorno readers contain no articles focusing on sociological methodology (Burke *et al.* 2007; Heberle 2006; Huhn and Zuidervaart 1997; Pensky 1997). Good discussions of specific aspects of Adorno's challenge to the discipline can be found in *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno* (Müller Doohm 2004), Volume I of Delanty's (2004a) compilation of previously published journal articles (Drake 2004; Frisby 2004), Jarvis's (2007) collection of reprints (see Becker Schmidt 1999; Cook 2001) and *A Critical Reader* (Turner 2002).

[9] It has been highlighted that, by comparison with his philosophy and aesthetics, Adorno's sociology is seldom explored in detail in the German literature (Negt 1995: 3; see also Becker Schmidt 1999: 104; Honneth 2005b: 165 6). Generally, though, German Adorno scholars place more emphasis on Adorno's sociological thought than their Anglophone colleagues

It is worth underlining that what will be discussed is Adorno's *sociology of society*. It is unlikely that an account of Adorno's engagement with a specific field or phenomenon could amount to a successful treatment of his sociology per se. Adorno's notion of specifically sociological methods and questions justifies a closer look at his sociology. His assertion that there is now 'nothing on earth' that is not socialised implies two things. Firstly, sociology lacks a designated field which could demarcate its disciplinary boundaries: to elucidate Adorno's sociological thought by concentrating on his work in one field or subfield would be restrictive. Secondly, sociology must tackle the task of examining how exchange society characterises any given phenomenon. This suggests that Adorno's sociology can and should be understood as a sociology of society – or as a sociology investigating exchange society, if the former description reads too awkwardly.

But does Adorno's caveat – what sociology *is* becomes clear only vis-à-vis what one *does* – not mean that his vision for sociology must be ascertained with reference to his writings in particular fields? Indeed, his work on designated areas is important to the expository analyses and, above all, to the illustrations of this book. However, its inquiry into what that work reveals about Adorno's sociology is guided by the more specific question of what that work reveals about his *sociology of exchange society*. The possibility that the two questions have comparable answers does not make them interchangeable. The second question gives an investigation of Adorno's sociology the required direction and emphasis. Moreover, in line with the notion that 'nothing on earth' is now not socialised, Adorno's sociology attends to, and is influenced by his experiences with, a myriad of different research phenomena. Investigating his sociology requires attention to his work in several specific subfields. While the discussions in this book are thus also informed by Adorno's writings on the sociology of music and the culture industry, these writings do not outweigh his works in other fields. Adorno's sociology of music is thematised by Witkin (1998) and is one of the three dimensions of Paddison's (1993) comprehensive exegesis. Adorno's culture industry theses have received abundant treatment.[10] This book cannot provide an inclusive

(see Müller Doohm's (1996) chronological *Introduction*, the sociological contributions to *Adorno Konferenz 1983* (esp. Bonß 1983; Ritsert 1983) and socio theoretical articles in *Adorno Konferenz 2003* (esp. Honneth 2005b; Neckel 2005) and other readers (Auer *et al.* 1998; Schweppenhäuser 1995). One of the most well known German critiques of Adorno's social theory with a view to sociology albeit chiefly against the backdrop of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is Honneth's 1991. Provocative readings of the emancipatory ideas in Adorno's theory of society can be found in Becker and Brakemeier's 2004 edited volume.

[10] See Apostolidis 2000: 31 56; Cook 1996; Hammer 2006: 72 83; Held 1980: 77 109; Hohendahl 1995: 119 48; Jameson 1990: 103 8, 139 54; Jarvis 1998: 72 89; Jenemann 2007; Kellner 2002; Müller Doohm 1996: 199 217; Offe 2005: 69 92; Paddison 2004: 91 105; Witkin 2003 and articles in Section III of Delanty 2004b and of Delanty 2004c.

discussion of those theses and the criticisms they have attracted. Critical interventions germane to specific arguments will be mentioned. Honneth's attack (1991: 77–81) on Adorno's bleak view of the culture industry as an instrument of total control, on his conception of powerless individuals as functions of capitalism and domination and on his neglect of the limits of manipulation in alternative cultural and social spheres is representative of many of those interventions. It is treated in detail by Cook (1996: 65–75, 152n1).

Adorno's sociology today

The emphasis of this book rests on clarifying and discussing Adorno's sociological thought in its own right. A detailed understanding of his perspectives on key aspects of sociology constitutes a prerequisite for any informed assessment of their contemporary relevance. A comprehensive evaluation of this kind for as broad an endeavour as twenty-first-century social science, the precise nature of which continues to be debated from many different viewpoints, is beyond the scope of this book. However, its exegetic focus neither hinders nor, arguably, does it exempt it from pointing out ways of assessing the implications of Adorno's sociological work for the discipline today. By presenting Adorno's sociology of society as clearly and inclusively as I have found possible, and by pinpointing selected intersections between it and concerns of contemporary social science, I aim to indicate that Adorno's sociological work speaks to present-day sociology, and to spark debates on its significance today, which nevertheless cannot be conducted here.

My explorations differ from DeNora's and Apostolidis's works. DeNora (2003) has developed proposals for empirical research from Adorno's sociology of music. Apostolidis's (2000) analysis of Christian-right culture is strongly informed by Adorno's critique of the culture industry and fundamentalist radio propaganda. These writings may reveal something about the potential of Adorno's sociological work to provide contemporary sociology with research tools. But the question is how much they reveal, namely to what degree one may still speak of *Adorno's* sociology here. Wholly legitimately, considering the aims of their studies, both scholars critically revised Adorno's ideas before applying them to current sociological questions. The objective of the following chapters is not to revise Adorno's ideas but to clarify them to make it possible to evaluate their potential to inform present-day social research.

Adorno's sociology offers challenging and unconventional views on issues that are still debated in the social sciences today, e.g. questions of interdisciplinarity, conceptualising society, empirical research, sociological

theorising and social science's socio-critical and political dimensions. Moreover, Adorno raises awareness of, and provides intriguing perspectives on, important but rarely discussed socio-scientific topics, e.g. the question of sociological writing – an activity most sociologists are engaged in but few ever address elaborately – and sociology's relationship with non-social reality. Finally, Adorno's sociological writings contain a number of empirical and analytical research devices for examining exchange society. By combining expositions of Adorno's ideas for sociology with illustrations of their applications in his analyses of specific cultural and social phenomena, I seek to foreground how those ideas informed the conduct of concrete social research. This may help readers make informed judgements on the relevance of Adorno's sociology for their own purposes.

Adorno's reflections on sociology as an endeavour mediated by the social reality that it studies are unusually, and uncomfortably, penetrating. Adorno staunchly refuses to cover up the obstacles to sociology's attempts to examine social life unearthed by his reflections. A thorough engagement with his work must highlight and further problematise the dilemmas that it encounters and creates. In relation to several present-day socio-scientific concerns, Adorno's sociological thought may emerge as a resource for sympathetic and timely ideas. His reflections on the limits of sociology, however, may appear anachronistic in the strict sense, grating against what is considered to be sociologically progressive. This might stimulate the temptation to dismiss his sociological work as an intellectually flawed obstruction to the advance of social science. Yet Adorno repeatedly reminds sociologists of the social contingency of socio-analytical predicaments. What would be progressive from this angle would be a critical awareness of the problems encountered by Adorno's sociology and a better grasp of the society that conditions them.

1 Nothing under the sun

One key difference between Adorno and many sociologists of his, as well as our, time is his unwavering refusal to 'ban' the concept of society 'as a philosophical relic' (S 145). Society, Adorno concedes, is not a thing outside or above humans. Society consists of social relations produced by, and operating between, *individuals*. Yet society consists of social relations *between* individuals. These relations have developed properties which are irreducible to the attributes of the sum of individuals entangled in them. Since it is thus impossible to grasp society by turning to its isolated constituents, the concept of society as a relational category referring to relations between humans is sociologically necessary (IS 33–4, 38–9). The following outline of Adorno's concept of society frames his vision for sociological examinations of society in respect of sociology's 'double character'. On the basis of these considerations, Adorno's vision for sociology can be explored in more depth with regards to the problem of selecting appropriate sociological research phenomena and through initial clarification of their interpretation.

Society as a sociological problem

Adorno conceptualises contemporary society in view of its constituent social relations. He also highlights three key aspects of society – social estrangement, social dependence and social integration – and their interconnections. 'Interconnections' is taken literally here: for Adorno, social science can no longer establish causal hierarchies, but must investigate how society's various aspects affect each other. Such investigations reveal the 'complications and contradictions to which the unfolding of . . . socialization . . . leads' (IS 34). It is in the face of these complications that Adorno is repeatedly compelled to inquire into the problems and potentials of a sociology that confronts the task of examining society. This sociological endeavour, he argues, has a 'double character' which renders sociology as problematic as what it is meant to examine. Society is omnipresent but elusive, indispensable for investigating anything but

frustratingly difficult to grasp. To Adorno, this quandary underscores the urgency of the question how to analyse contemporary society and the need for a sociological response to it.

The commodity exchange relation

Adorno doubts that society's fate is ultimately decided by the political system or the development of productive forces.[1] Politics (CM 281) as well as the productive forces of the industrial society are fettered by the organisation or relations of production, the true determining factor of social reality (CLA 117–21, IS 96, ISW 229, 237–8).[2] The social relations presently governing society are commodity exchange relations (IS 31–3, PD 68). Society is organised by the 'principle' (1993c: 24) of commodity exchange and obeys the 'exchange relation' (CLA 120). Adorno characterises contemporary society as capitalist society, 'commodity society' (SDE 158) or *Tauschgesellschaft*: 'exchange society' (IS 43, PETG 49, 195). The preponderance of commodity exchange, Adorno occasionally notes, suggests that capitalism originated in the 'age of manufacture' of the late 1500s (A&B 108) and has affinities with ancient Greek bourgeois-urban formations (VSI 253; see also A&K 516–17). But Adorno rarely broaches social conditions prior to the nineteenth century. In fact, his sociological work overwhelmingly focuses on the exchange relations of twentieth-century capitalism.

Social relationships strictly conforming to 'the universal principle of [commodity] exchange' (PETG 95), which capitalism 'cherishes as its own', are conservative. 'Exchange is the rational form of mythical ever-sameness. In the like-for-like of every act of exchange, the one act revokes the other; the balance of accounts is null. If the exchange was just, then nothing should . . . have happened, . . . everything stays the same' (CM 159); 'people are quits, things are just as they were before' (HF 170). In a fair and equal exchange, one party transfers a commodity of a certain value to another party. This redistribution alters the socio-economic conditions surrounding the parties. The recipient, however, returns the exact same value as payment. The payment annuls the social transformation occasioned by the initial transfer and reinstalls the original socio-economic conditions. Commodity exchange relations based on a fair

[1] See Cook (2004a: 11 16, see also 1998) and Jarvis (1998: 59 61) on these points respectively.

[2] Technology is relatively autonomous insofar as insights into social relations will not help structural engineers understand how to build a stable house. But technology is socially governed in that the very demand for such a house and the creation of the means to meet it are socially determined (VSI 311 12).

'like-for-like of calculations without remainder' entail socially transformative acts and their 'revocation', thus obstructing social change (1961: 41–2, see also 1971: 13).

Yet the exchange principle is 'perforated in all sorts of places' (PETG 95). In particular, Adorno argues – echoing Marx's (1976: 320–9) theory of exploitation – the social relation between workers and capital, which involves the 'exchange of living labour against the wage' (PETG 97) and sustains capitalism's class division (S 149), disobeys the imperative of fair commodity exchange. The labourer selling the commodity of labour power relinquishes the value consumed by the production of his labour power plus any extra value labour creates during the time of employment. The wage paid by capital, however, compensates only the reproduction of labour power. The worker is exploited; the capitalist skims surplus value off the transaction. The transfer of labour power alters the socio-economic conditions surrounding both parties. But instead of undoing this transformation and reinstating the original conditions, the wage payment constitutes a further redistribution of values. Since 'the exchange of the commodity labour power for the cost of its reproduction' contradicts the capitalist 'lie of . . . equality', the socially transformative 'acts . . . do not . . . reciprocally sublate themselves'. 'Through this injustice, something new occurs in the exchange' (CM 159).

Adorno's analysis of the class antagonism will be explored in more detail below. What unites all social relations of commodity exchange is the exchange of *equivalents*. Adorno follows Marx's (1976: 125–77, see also IS 31–2) analysis of the commodity in *Capital*. For commodity exchange to function, qualitatively distinct products must be made comparable. The 'basic principle of bourgeois society', Adorno (PETG 177, see also SoI 188) states accordingly, is 'the abstraction from the specific use values, the specific qualities which things develop in themselves and through humans dealing with them, in favour of their universal form of equivalence'. The comparison of different products requires their reduction to a common property: their being products of human labour. Yet, since different products are crafted by qualitatively distinct forms of human labour, rendering those products comparable demands that these different forms of labour – of 'humans dealing with things' – be made commensurable. To this end, distinct modes of labour are reduced to their common attribute: the pure expense of effort. 'The universal exchange principle', Adorno asserts, 'cuts off the qualities, the specific properties, of the goods to be exchanged' as well as the qualities of 'the producers' specific forms of labour' (ISW 236). Exchange value, through which commodities are compared, is measured as the average amount of abstract social labour time consumed by their fabrication. Capitalism's

constituent commodity exchange relations involve the exchange of equivalents based on the reduction of qualitatively different products and modes of human labour to their lowest common denominators.

Adorno emphasises that capitalist exchange relations require the exchanging parties to adopt a specific mode of thinking: the principle of identification or identity thinking. The exchange and identity principles are said to be *urverwandt*, originally akin to one another. Identification is 'schooled in exchange' (JA 107) and 'exchange would not be without' the transactors' adopting the identification principle. Identity thinking has two distinguishing features. Firstly, it constitutes the intellectual act of classification or categorisation, whereby distinct, particular objects are translated into examples of a general kind or species and thus made equivalent with one another. Secondly, identification takes categories produced by humans in society as describing intrinsic, natural properties of objects (ND 149, see also CM 252–3, HF 119; 1991a: 110–11). Adorno's argument continues to be informed by Marx's investigation of the commodity, which demonstrates that capitalist exchange actualises both aspects of identity thinking. Commodity exchange involves making different products equivalent through their translation into entities carrying exchange value; whereby qualitatively distinct modes of labour are made equivalent through their translation into examples of abstract labour. Furthermore, Marx shows that in capitalism, exchange value – a category generated by, and expressing relations between, humans in their productive activity – is accepted as describing natural properties of objects. According to Adorno, capitalist exchange relations cannot be sustained – the exchange of equivalent commodities cannot function – unless the agents of exchange carry out this twofold intellectual operation of identification.

Social estrangement

Lukács (1949: 42–3, 57–8) criticises Heidegger's methodological hierarchy, alleging that Heidegger starts out from the suffering subject and thus bars insight into social reality. Despite his debt to Lukács[3] and strict opposition to Heidegger, Adorno rejects Lukács's critique. Adorno certainly acknowledges that social relations govern social life. But Lukács's disregard for the 'subjective suffering' conditioned by the experience of the 'objective negativity' is unjustified. The 'sediment' of 'horror in the subject', Adorno insists, is momentous for critical social analysis

[3] Buck Morss 1977: 25 8; Hall 2006; Hammer 2006: 27 37; O'Connor 2004: 8 13; Sherratt 2002: 38 41.

(VSI 254). A key symptom of this horror is estrangement.[4] It is true that Adorno was wary of using the *concept* of estrangement abundantly, although it recurs throughout several of his writings. Estrangement being a 'state of consciousness' (ND 191), Adorno feared the concept of estrangement might shift attention away from the social conditions generating estrangement to its manifestation in subjective experience (IS 3). Adorno's careful employment of the concept may have led some interpreters to understate the importance of the problem of estrangement for his theory of society.[5] But as Chapter 5 will show, Adorno was looking for alternative ways of expressing estrangement precisely because of its continuing importance. The subjective state of estrangement is conditioned by, hence reflects, and in turn also has a profound impact on, contemporary social life.

Estrangement and sociology's double character Durkheim (1982: 50–83) demands that sociology examine society as *faits sociaux*: social facts which are external to, coercive upon, and independent from, the individual and must be treated as if they were things. According to Adorno, the notion of *faits sociaux* instructively registers the problem of social estrangement. 'Humans cannot recognise themselves in society . . ., because they are estranged from each other and the whole. Their reified social relations necessarily present themselves to them as a being-in-itself' (SP1 69). In its 'opaqueness' as 'estranged objectivity' (SP1 76), capitalist society conceals its specifically human relations (ND 299) and its historical variability (SSI 445). Instead, society confronts individuals as a strange, autonomous object: impenetrable to their understanding and actions, inscrutable and overwhelming, obscure and irresistible (SSI 238–40, VSII 674–7). Durkheim's concept of *faits sociaux* highlights social estrangement in contemporary society by capturing how it befalls humans as an invariant thing.

However, Durkheim's (1982: 69) conviction that 'social phenomena are things' misrepresents people's estranged, misguided perspective as congruent with social reality. Durkheim, Adorno alleges, threatens to conceal the fact that social relations, notwithstanding their ostensible objectivity, consist solely of humans. Despite its invariant appearance, society has developed historically and is currently maintained by

[4] Estrangement plays a major role in *The Authoritarian Personality*, where Adorno demands that 'the scientific understanding of society . . . include an understanding of what it does to people' (AP 975).

[5] See Cook 2004a, 2004b; Jameson 1969; Jarvis 1998: 59; Jay 1984b: 267n92. Adorno's 1968 description of the 'concept of reification' as 'worn out' (CM 223) does not signify the unimportance of the problem of reification to his social thought either.

individuals themselves (IS 37, 43, 145–7, S 151–2). At present, 'humans . . . do not know [social] tendencies as their own' (SP1 76), but '[t]he totality [Totale] reproduces itself time and again through the particulars of social life, ultimately individuals' (SSI 586). What appears as fate in capitalist conditions ultimately 'refers back to humans, human society, and could be turned around by humans' (SSI 452, see also CM 156).

Adorno acknowledges the possibility of pre-capitalist forms of estrangement (IS 81–2), but his work usually engages with estrangement as it is conditioned by contemporary exchange society. Moreover, Adorno understands estrangement rigorously as *social* estrangement, as estrangement from *society*. 'In the *Dinghaften* [thing*ly* and thing-*like*]', he emphasises, 'both are within one another, the unidentical of the object and the subjection of humans under dominant relations of production, their own context of functions irrecognisable to them' (ND 192). The world appears objective partly because it *is* objective (thingly) rather than created by humans; and partly because social reality, produced by humans, now *seems* objective (is thing-like). Experiencing the world as object is only precarious in the latter, social sense of experiencing a human, historical reality as a thing. Experiences of truly objective elements of reality as the things that they are lie outside the realm of estrangement as Adorno conceives it.[6] This specification is consistent with his broad conception of labour. Labour encompasses all engagement with reality, all living activity, including thinking. As such, labour is the activity reproducing the life of the species (HTS 19–23). Currently, this 'process of . . . labour, . . . production' and 'life' comprises the activities reproducing society (IS 38). Correspondingly, when Adorno speaks of people's experience of the inscrutable 'wall of congealed labour' (SP2 93), he means social estrangement: 'estrangement of living humans from . . . social powers' (VSII 676).[7]

The confusion about society generated by estrangement urges a question that is essential for Adorno's intellectual project: How can exchange society be examined at all? Adorno's description of sociology as the 'intellectual medium by which one hopes to deal with estrangement'

[6] Adorno rejects all 'talk' of 'self estrangement' from one's true being, since this falsely implies that humans once were everything they could be (ND 274).

[7] Adorno is concerned about estrangement generally, not only the proletariat's estrange ment. He seldom explicitly mentions the workers' 'growing alienation from the mecha nized labor process that they can no longer comprehend' (CLA 107, see also VSII 674 5). Moreover, the notion of estranged labour as estranged social powers, though reconcilable with the early Marx's theory of estrangement, suggests a difference in emphasis. A detailed investigation of the exact significance of Marx's (1975: 270 82) 1844 text on estranged labour for Adorno's conception of society would be a worthwhile project and facilitate a comparison between their concepts of estrangement.

(IS 3) reveals the main addressee of his question. His critique of Durkheim underlines that he demands a response from sociology – albeit a response more adequate than Durkheim's *chosisme* (thing-ism), which ultimately fails to solve the riddle of society (IS 37, SSI 240). A sociology examining exchange society, Adorno holds, must fully acknowledge estrangement, but simultaneously resist taking skewed estranged social experiences for revelations of society's true constitution. These two demands are not easily reconcilable. Indeed, rather than proposing a reconciliation, Adorno exposes the conflict. Sociologists are given a double task and encouraged to cultivate sociology's corresponding 'double character' (PD 33). Sociology must derive from the same social life process 'precisely these two ... conflicting moments in society's character, ... its incomprehensibility, its opacity on the one side, and on the other side its ultimate reducibility to something human and insofar its comprehensibility' (IS 82–3). Sociology must register the dilemma that society confronts individuals as an objective, invariant thing. For such 'false consciousness is simultaneously right consciousness': 'inner and outer life are torn apart' (SP1 69–70). Society is '[o]bjective ... because ... its own subjectivity is not transparent to it'. At the same time, sociology cannot accept the perspective of an objective totality as the truth about society. Estrangement is registered as the *mis*recognition of a non-transparent society *qua* invariant object. Ultimately, 'society is subjective because it refers back to the humans who constitute it' (PD 33). Hence sociologists must also strive to decipher society as the human, historical reality that it is. Unsurprisingly, for a sociology forced to tackle both of these tasks, nailing society down conceptually is not on the cards. The problem of social estrangement is brought into sharper focus, but exchange society remains elusive to the concept's grasp. Adorno's first response to the question how sociology can examine exchange society almost immediately reiterates the question.

Estrangement and natural history Adorno's writings on society from the 1930s clarify his approach to social estrangement and underscore the gravity of this problem in his social thought. Estrangement manifests itself as the individual's confrontation with a historical society as nature. The world created by humans, Adorno argues in a 1932 lecture on the idea of natural history,[8] appears to them as second nature (INH 260–1). Adorno appropriates the Hegelian concept of second

[8] On this complex idea, see Buck Morss 1977: 52 62; Hullot Kentor 2006: 234 51; Paddison 1993: 29 35; Pensky 2004. I can only discuss one layer of Adorno's lecture here.

nature through Lukács's (1971b: 62–4) early work, where it designates a world of convention which has become petrified and estranged. The early Lukács's concept is not yet couched in Marxist theory, but Adorno uses it in this sense.[9] The 'world of commodities' is an 'estranged world' (INH 260): a world of 'estranged things' and 'human relations' (1989: 40, see also 27). The concept of second nature continued to inform Adorno's efforts to register social estrangement in subsequent decades. In his later writings, 'second nature' still implies that 'what is produced' as a 'context of functions' by human activity lays hold of the 'insignia of nature' (ND 351). Durkheim's objective, invariant *faits sociaux*, Adorno explains, are precisely second nature: society congealed vis-à-vis the living (IS 81, S 147).

However, similarly to his later Durkheim critique, Adorno's early writings accentuate that the concept of second nature does not faithfully represent the present social conditions in which it is generated. Second nature is the 'historically produced ... semblance' of a world of convention which has become 'foreign'. '[W]e believe that we are able to meaningfully understand [reality]', but 'we have lost reality' (INH 267–8). Accordingly, Adorno's earliest analyses of capitalist society already formulate the question 'how it is possible to know, to interpret this estranged, thing-like [dinghafte], dead world' (INH 261).

In the early 1930s, Benjamin's book on German *Trauerspiel* (baroque tragic drama) was among Adorno's (1995) principal intellectual sources.[10] In baroque allegory, writes Benjamin (1998: 166), 'the *facies hippocratica* of history lies before the beholder's eyes as petrified primordial landscape'. The notion of history as primordial landscape resonates with Lukács's concept of a world of convention in its rigid, petrified forms.[11] Yet Benjamin, Adorno (GS1 357) points out, adds 'something ... different': 'the word ... transience [Vergänglichkeit]'. According to Benjamin (1998: 179), baroque writers saw nature only 'in the over-ripeness and decay of its creatures. In nature they saw eternal transience, and here alone did ... this generation recognize history.' Thus where Lukács sees the transformation of history, 'that-which-has-been[,] into nature',

[9] See Buck Morss 1977: 55. By 1932, Lukács had long employed 'second nature' in the Marxist context of *History and Class Consciousness*: 'man in capitalist society con fronts a reality "made" by himself ... which appears ... to be a natural phenomenon alien to himself' (1971a: 135). Although the influence of this book is undeniable (Honneth 2005b: 168 76), it is not clear that Adorno found Lukács's earlier *Theory of the Novel* less agreeable (A&K 79 8, 121, 208).

[10] Benjamin was familiarising himself with Lukács's Marxism when writing this book, but it seems to have had little influence on it (1991a: 878 9).

[11] 'After all', Adorno writes to Benjamin, 'the baroque knew estrangement' (A&B 108).

Benjamin sees 'nature ... as transitory ..., as history' (INH 262). In Benjamin's (1998: 177) terms, '"history" stands written on the countenance of nature in the characters of transience'. Adorno, reintroducing Lukács's term, argues that 'whenever "second nature" appears, when the world of convention approaches, it can be deciphered in that its meaning is shown to be precisely its transience' (INH 264). Transience encoding history, second nature, Adorno appears to suggest, must be deciphered as historical. Indeed, for Lukács, Adorno emphasises, 'the petrified life of nature is a mere product of historical development' (INH 262). More than three decades later, Adorno will remind the philosophy of history that to interpret means 'to tease out of the phenomena, out of second nature, out of ... the world around us that has been mediated by history and society, their having-become [Gewordensein]' (HF 134).

Benjamin allows Adorno to characterise this historical life more sharply. In the baroque, writes Benjamin (1998: 179), 'the events of history shrivel up' only '[i]n the process of decay'. 'Whenever something historical appears', Adorno states (INH 264), 'it refers back to the natural element that passes away in it'. Benjamin (1998: 166) specifies that in the baroque, history is expressed in a 'death's head': the 'figure' of the human being's 'subjugation to nature'. The history depicted by baroque tragic drama is that of the earthly creature, the finite human being. What the death's head 'expresse[s]', Benjamin continues, is '[e]verything about history that, from the beginning, has been untimely, *Leidvolles* [sorrowful, painful, full of suffering], unsuccessful'. The baroque offers a 'secular exposition of history as *Leidensgeschichte* [passion, history of suffering] of the world'. Importantly for Adorno, Benjamin highlights a history 'translated to ... dead and dying nature, ... ruin, collapse, vain hopes, unsuccessful plans, and the repeated depiction of the expiring creature' (Pensky 2004: 233).

The problem of social estrangement emerges as an unrelenting concern of Adorno's. In his 1930s philosophy of history as well as in his later sociology, the subject's estrangement from society motivates the question how it is possible to gain insight into social reality. Social analysis, Adorno responds, must register how society befalls individuals as objective, invariant nature *and* refrain from concealing society's historical properties and the fact that it has been generated by humans. Adorno's early 'natural history' foreshadows certain aspects of his later reading of Durkheim. Durkheim instructively registers the 'solidified character of society', but ends up 'justif[ying]' it by 'equat[ing] social estrangement with socialisation as such, instead of recognising it as something which has originated [Entsprungenes] and, according to its possibility, something transient

[Vergängliches]' (SSI 251). Adorno insists on the double character of sociological examinations of exchange society. Simultaneously, he must admit that society continues to elude sociology's conceptual framework. The sociologist invariably ends up holding conflicting perspectives on social reality and is compelled to pose the problem of analysing society all over again.

Social dependence

Adorno (HTS 18), citing Marx (1975: 332–3), reads the productive Hegelian *Geist* (spirit) as an astute representation of humans as results of their labour. Currently, Adorno clarifies, people's dependence on life-preserving activity means that their survival depends on paid work. Since work is paid only if it is seen to fulfil a purpose, 'every individual must, so as to scrape a living, take a function upon himself and is instructed to be thankful as long as he has one' (S 145). By envisaging *Geist* as a force irreducible to the isolated individual, crucially, Hegel suggests that labour takes place within a social 'ordering of functions' (HTS 18). At present, specifies Adorno, work counts as purposive and worth remunerating if it meets a function which *society* acknowledges as legitimate. In a society in which production primarily serves business gain according to the abstract laws of exchange (S 148, SoI 188), the dominant standard of purposive activity is profitability. In their dependence on paid labour, individuals depend on fulfilling 'function[s] within the monstrous social machinery' (Adorno, Horkheimer *et al.* [1950] 1989a: 122–3). Capitalism is a context of social dependence: every individual's life is at the mercy of exchange society's 'institutions': primarily its 'economy'; secondarily its 'administrations' (ISW 242).

Adorno's conception of dependence plays an important role in his analysis of capitalism's class antagonism. The class divide is reproduced by the exchange of labour for wages between exploited workers and capitalists acquiring surplus. This urges the question why labourers enter into commodity exchange relations that exploit them. Adorno's response is multifarious. Firstly, workers are ever less aware of their status as the exploited class. Adorno emphasises that the shortcomings of proletarian class consciousness do not prove the dissolution of class society (CLA 112–14, PETG 57–8),[12] but can be explained precisely with reference to the perpetuation of capitalism (IS 22–4): social relations

[12] Marx's category of 'class', Adorno highlights, never meant to capture a state of conscious ness, but its members' relationship to the means of production (see SSI 519 20).

are increasingly veiled by the omnipresent domination of concentrated capital; lacking internal consensus, subjected to the same police control as the workers (CLA 98–100; see also Cook 2004b: 301), and no longer present in the workplace (PETG 76–7, SSI 187), the bourgeoisie are scarcely recognisable as the workers' adversary; the number of 'traditional' material labourers has decreased (IS 24); and technical controllers recruited from the workforce replace owners as superiors visible to workers, creating 'the illusion of equal opportunities' (MM 194). The workers' waning prospect of political success due to the ever stronger grip of 'big business' around a social reality that appears natural and invariant further hamstrings their opposition to the exploitative system (CLA 96–7, PETG 91).

Secondly, the proletariat's integration into bourgeois society has advanced much further than Marx had envisaged. Partly thanks to trade union bargaining, workers obtain more of the social product than ever before, enjoy a higher living standard – 'have more to lose than their chains, namely ... their small car or ... motorbike' (PETG 65) – and receive better public economic protection, e.g. through unemployment programmes.[13] The workers' integration, which contributes to the problem that 'no proletarian knows that he is one anymore' (A&K 602, see also CLA 114–15), renders them increasingly disinclined to contest capitalist social relations, although these relations are exploitative. Quick to deny that integration means economic equality for the workers, Adorno accentuates that monopolisation sustains the class gap (PETG 51, 87, 93). Even pauperisation – also as 'growing powerlessness', as Cook (2004b: 302) notes – remains an inherent tendency of the capitalist economy. The workers' share in the social product, which protects them from the worst economic effects of pauperisation, merely forms part of the bourgeoisie's political measures to protect the system from revolution (CLA 102–7; see also Cook 2004a: 15–16): 'appropriated surplus value in part flows back to the people via the trade unions ... as a kind of charity', because otherwise 'society would explode' (PETG 196).

The strongest force behind the proletariat's readiness to enter into capitalism's exploitative social relations, finally, seems to be their social dependence. '[F]ormally', Adorno emphasises, the exchange between the worker and the capitalist is a 'free contractual relation': neither is made to enter it by violent force (PETG 96). In fact, since ultimately capital needs labour as much as the labourer needs a salary, one might expect proletarians to be able to insist on non-exploitative arrangements. However, the two classes' different positions with regards to the means of production

[13] CLA 102 4, IS 24, PETG 51 5, 83, SSI 183 4.

(HF 51, MM 193, PETG 57–8) introduce an imbalance of dependency and power into their exchange relation which turns it into a free agreement between a mouse and a lion. The labourer has nothing but his labour power and must therefore sell it to capital instantly or ‘go hungry’. ‘[T]he entrepreneur’, by contrast, controls the means of production and can usually rely on surplus labour. If the labourer delays the transaction ‘until [he] . . . comes to his senses’ and trades his labour for a wage for sheer survival, the capitalist will still be a long way from ruin. This allows capital simply to offer an exchange contract in its favour and ‘wait’ (PETG 96–7, see also 97–9, 196) until the worker, who might refuse initially, understands that he must sell labour for a salary at once or perish, accepts the contract on offer, and consents to his own exploitation. Due to their disadvantageous position in respect of the means of production, workers depend on trading labour for a wage more immediately and do not even have the power to decline those exchange contracts with capital that exploit them.

Adorno often emphasises the psychological quandaries created by social dependence, especially in connection with social estrangement. People’s estranged experience of an objective, invariant society entails that in their social dependence, they live at the mercy of institutions they cannot understand and feel unable to intervene in. In exchange society, Adorno writes polemically, even salaried work appears as ‘disguised unemployment support’, arbitrarily granted by a distant authority which may withdraw it at any time (JA 34). This situation is terrifying. ‘The experience of being estranged from precisely those on whom one’s own fate largely depends is painful . . . because the fear is intensified that one is delivered up to anonymous powers and processes, of which one has no intuition, which one therefore does not comprehend, and which one then faces in a doubly helpless manner’ (VSII 678). Although this passage deals with workers specifically, Adorno seems to understand the problem it describes as applying more generally: those ‘yoked into . . . society’ feel ‘constantly . . . threatened’ by it (JA 34–5).

Adorno’s response to the question how sociology can examine the social whole on which everybody depends strikes a more careful tone. Adorno underscores that in exchange society people owe their lives to a structure which confronts them as inscrutable and impenetrable. ‘Society’s context of functions has . . . overpowering predominance [Übermacht] vis-à-vis every individual’ (VSI 328). Sociologists would be ill-advised to belittle the terror and anxiety that estrangement and dependence cause people. Nor, however, can sociology simply accept people’s terrifying experience as representing the reality of the problem. Hegel’s sublimation of labour as a metaphysical act of *Geist*, Adorno

alleges, inadvertently misrepresents the social conditions of labour as absolute, and venerates exploitation as right (HTS 22–5).[14] The totality organising life-preserving activity, Adorno counters, is not as unbending as it seems. Humans ultimately depend on historical conditions they themselves are perpetuating. When Adorno emphasises that '[n]o individuals' working to satisfy their demands 'can exist' independently of 'the society in which they live', he immediately adds that 'the process by which [society] is maintained is . . . the process of life, of labour, of production and reproduction . . . kept in motion by . . . individuals' (IS 38, see also P 77). Social dependence is 'dependency of all individuals on the totality which *they* form' (S 145, emphasis added) – and which they could therefore abolish along with systematic exploitation. Adorno's analysis of social dependence sustains the double character of his sociology, while society itself continues to evade conceptual determination. The question of how it is possible to examine exchange society receives a further response, but this response also reiterates the question.

Social integration

When his sociology students asked him to specify his conception of social integration after a lecture in 1964, Adorno responded: 'The integration of society has grown in the sense of increasing socialisation; the social web has been spun ever more tightly, there are ever fewer areas . . . that are not . . . more or less seized by society' (PETG 106). For Adorno, social integration is a further key aspect of exchange society. It constitutes the thematic context in which the considerations outlined so far begin to interlink more closely.

Ramifications of integration Capitalism is dominated by commodity exchange relations. The 'medium of the universality', which establishes and maintains connections between society's components, is exchange (SoI 188). Through the process of social integration, ever more areas of social life, notably individuals, adapt to capitalist society. Eventually, every dimension of collective and individual existence is entangled by commodity exchange relations and comes to conform to their principle.[15]

[14] Like Benjamin's (2006: 393 4) attack on Weimar Social Democracy's glorification of labour, Adorno draws on Marx's (1996) 'Critique of the Gotha Programme'.
[15] Adorno's qualification of this notion will be problematised in Chapter 6.

Social integration allows the exchange principle to govern all productive activities (HTS 20, 27–8). Production only secondarily satisfies needs; its primary end is the generation of profit (CLA 117, HF 50–1). For Adorno, production encompasses all living activity. Human existence is largely dedicated to 'self-conservation' through work (ND 169, S 147). Even spare-time activities are chiefly means to recreate labour power for production (SDE 101, 1941: 38), as in the case of sports, which functions to enhance fitness for work (CM 173–4). Accordingly, the socialisation of production entails the mobilisation of virtually all human activity for commodity exchange. The entertainment and advertising industries advance this process by manipulating people's consumption behaviour and needs into serving profitable commerce (SP1 77–8; see also Cook 2004a: 26, 46). Industries control existing needs, which is exemplified by the success of the camping business in turning the prevalent desire to escape the confines of the home into a want for tents and campervans (CM 170), and they 'produc[e]' new wants for consumer articles (DE 115). Social integration ensures that the entire human being is entangled in exchange relations. People's work, creative activity, consumption, desires and 'most intimate impulses' are made to unfold according to roles within the machinery (CLA 117, S 152). Socialisation 'reduc[es] … humans to agents and bearers of commodity exchange' (S 148–9, see also PD 14) until they conform completely ('mit Haut und Haar', literally: 'with skin and hair') (PETG 112). A sociology concerned with the 'predominance of the exchange principle', Adorno contends, transcends 'the concept of macro-sociology' (SoI 188). Social integration lets 'nothing between heaven and earth' escape (IS 64). Exchange relations come to determine not only institutions and structures but also individual existence, including its tiniest facets.

Adorno's analysis of social adjustment draws inspiration from Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd*. Twentieth-century America, Riesman (1953: 17, 23) argues, is witnessing the replacement of inner-directed persons with an other-directed type. The inner-directed person's engagement with the world is oriented by an internal set of goals which develops under the impact of familial authority. The person is kept on a relatively stable course. Choices are channelled through a highly individualised character which nonetheless allows for flexibility (1953: 28–32, 59–62). The other-directed type's sources of direction, by contrast, are the sets of contemporary others encountered throughout life, whereby the mass media play a central role.[16] Thus other-directed orientation remains open to constant reconfiguration by the social environment and ensures

[16] Jenemann (2007: 158 61) mentions the relevance of Riesman's reading of mass culture for Adorno's analysis of the culture industry.

close behavioural conformity (1953: 32–40, 120–8). To Adorno, the shift described by Riesman illustrates that 'in the . . . adaptation processes', which capitalist society 'incessantly demand[s]' of individuals, 'not much more of the so-called individual . . . remains . . . than its ideology' (PETG 107).

Social integration, Adorno continues, lets society 'wash over' quality (ISW 236). The idea that different individuals adjusting to the same society become 'microscopic replicas of the whole' (IS 41) is lucid enough. Yet Adorno's point is more specific. He argues that people's adjustment to *exchange* society involves a particularly thoroughgoing homogenisation process.[17] Commodity exchange depends upon making different products and different forms of labour equivalent by reducing them to a common denominator. Socialisation allows exchange relations to seize all production as life activity, all consumption, the individual's needs and most private impulses. Correspondingly, social integration in contemporary exchange society entails the dequalification, reduction and homogenisation of every detail of human life. In the 'universal exchange relation', 'everything that exists' is only a 'being for something else': everything must be equivalent and fungible (HTS 28). The ideal of total exchange is that 'all are for all and . . . everything that exists is only a for-something-else and not an in-itself'. The 'pressure . . . develops . . . to be like all others and, down to the innermost modes of behaviour, not to differ, not to be conspicuous' (2009b: 153, see also PETG 111–12). Along with their products and 'performances', 'individual beings' *tout court* become 'commensurable' through 'exchange' (ND 149). The 'producers' and consumers' qualitative features' are 'disregarded'. Even people's desires are levelled out as calculable commercial entities. '[T]he abstract comparability of their social labour' culminates in 'the erasure of their identity' (S 148).

Adorno underlines the homogenising tendency of socialisation with reference to the growing division of labour in capitalist society. According to Spencer's (1885, 1896) theory of social structures, progressive social integration – the political conjoining of smaller societies into compounds, for instance, or the snowball-like advancement of an industrial society of interdependent components – involves industrial divisions which differentiate social life into a complex organism of ever more unlike parts. Adorno, by contrast, maintains that 'the quantity of integration . . . has inhibited . . . differentiation' (SSI 181). He concedes that social integration involves a rigorous division of labour and that Spencer's theory might have even been appropriate to nineteenth-century society. Yet in

[17] For a critical discussion of Adorno's conception of the 'levelling', 'reifying' effects of the exchange principle in light of alternative, notably Habermas's, ideas, see Cook 2004a: esp. 26 7, 44 9 and 2004b.

the meantime, the work process has been so finely divided, its individual tasks so specialised, that tasks are reduced to scarcely distinguishable expenditures of mental and physical effort: 'ultimately ... anyone can take care of everything'. The division of labour has occasioned social 'de-differentiation' (IS 42, see also CLA 108).

However, Spencer's notion of integrative differentiation, Adorno warns (PETG 108), instructively suggests that integration is not synonymous with the reconciliation of social contradictions. Integration involves the adjustment of individuals to the same *antagonistic* social whole. Individuals adapt to a society which sustains the class divide. The commodity exchange relations entangling all individuals form a whole in which workers are systematically exploited. Moreover, humans adjust to a social reality which is contradictory in that it is maintained by individuals in history while befalling them as an invariant objectivity. Integration intensifies this latter antagonism by intensifying reification. The term 'reification' has multiple meanings in Adorno's work. Two points are especially important here.

Through integration, all products, their producers and their consumers are entangled in exchange relations. Their social and human qualities are disregarded and they are made commensurable with reference to exchange value.[18] In capitalist exchange, Adorno emphasises, exchange value is treated 'as a thing in itself, as "nature"' (ND 348). The 'fetish-character of commodities' reflects 'objectified labour'; 'the fact that [the world congealed into products] has been produced by humans' is 'forgotten' (SDE 173). Correspondingly, '[t]he universal dominance of exchange value over human beings ... degrades subjectivity ... to a mere object' (ND 180). Neither commodities nor humans are mere objects. Yet where the law of exchange 'provides the objectively valid model for all essential social events' (PD 80), humans de facto treat their products, each other and themselves as things. The 'administrative clerk', Adorno exemplifies, 'sees humans ... as objects which he evaluates in view of usability or non-usability' (Adorno, Horkheimer *et al.* [1950] 1989a: 137). Just like 'labor has become a commodity and ... reified' (CM 169), 'the reification of human beings ... objectively occur[s] in the conditions of society' (CM 249). As a consequence, humans live their social relations as though they were relations between things. They 'align themselves with the commodity world and ... reify also their relationships with other individuals' (SSI 191). A society 'dominated by the abstract principle of exchange' is 'divested of the immediacy of human relations' and 'reified' (CM 120). This reinforces the appearance of social life as

[18] 'Exchange value' even 'dominates human needs and replaces them' (PD 80). See Cook 2004a: 44 9, on the ramifications of these aspects of reification for interpersonal life.

objective rather than maintained by humans. The 'reification of social life . . . in a society dominated by exchange-value' occasions 'the estrangement of the human being from a reality that comes into focus as a mere commodity' (1989: 39, see also SDE 173).

Furthermore, as socialisation seizes every facet of life, 'humanity . . . exhaust[s] itself in the adaptation to what is respectively present' (1961: 42, see also 1993c: 27). No facet of life opposes or deviates from the social norm any more. Human 'energy' is wholly channelled into reproducing the existing order (CLA 109). As a result, society, although reproduced by individuals alone, functions automatically, just like an objective mechanism independent of humans (ND 309–10). Capitalism develops according to quasi-natural 'social and economic laws' (SSI 36). It runs on as if it were unhistorical and invariable. Due to people's total adaptation, their social relations are autonomised, petrified, solidified, reified.[19] Again, society therefore appears to its constituent subjects as if it were really objective and inherently invariant (see GEX 16). Once every facet of reality is 'completely trapped by social and rational mechanisms', which become 'the only reality' there is, society develops the 'semblance' of 'the natural' (HF 120–1, see also SSI 443–4). The world of convention is petrified history (INH 261–2). It is ever harder to recognise it as a status quo which has been historically produced, is maintained, and could be changed, by collective human action. '[R]eified' institutions are 'estranged', confronting humans 'as a strange and threatening power' (ISW 242–3), as a conglomeration of 'estranged social necessities' (SP2 86).

Finally, social integration intensifies social dependence. As society seizes ever more aspects of individual and collective life – proletarian and bourgeois – the chances of surviving without participating in the functional context of exchange society are slimming: 'the zone in which humans can lead a life independently of [the] social mechanism has become ever smaller' (Adorno, Horkheimer *et al.* [1950] 1989a: 124); 'no [more] poverty in dignity, no longer even the possibility of a humble wintering for him who falls out of the administered world' (Adorno 1991a: 119). In Huxley's eerie novel, a dystopian 'Brave New World' worships itself with the shibboleth 'community, identity, stability'. Adorno cites it (P 99) – yet not to warn of a future, but to cast the ramifications of social integration into relief: people's tendency to totally adapt to exchange society, homogenise within it, and the intensification of social estrangement and dependence due to an ever more solidified society.

[19] CM 155 6, IS 29 30, 151, ISW 225, P 77, PD 74, SSI 89.

Process of integration Integration partly thrives on the dependence of people's survival on society. In the 'total context . . . all must submit to the law of exchange, if they do not want to perish' (S 149). This argument echoes a similar idea in Horkheimer's work (2004: 95–6). 'Adjustment', Adorno points out, 'is the mode of behaviour which corresponds to the situation of "too little"' (P 93). Humans assimilate to society and embrace its technological apparatus because they 'owe their life to what is being done to them' (S 152). Yet dependence alone cannot make adaptation understood. The people 'whom [society] comprises . . . depen[d] on man-made conditions' (SDE 154). Hence socially dependent individuals could alter, instead of blindly accepting, the social conditions that decide their survival. In contemporary society, however,

> relations . . . are experienced . . . as autonomised and force [the individual] into adaptation. (GEX 23)

> [H]umans no longer recognise themselves in what is seemingly inflicted [verhängt] upon them by a secret ruling and are therefore ready to accept that fate [Verhängnis]. (SSI 448)

> [F]atality . . . is down to the fact that human conditions and relations between humans have become opaque to themselves and, by virtue of the fact that they no longer know anything of themselves, namely as relations between humans, have taken on this overpowering character vis à vis humans. (ISW 243)

In estranged conditions, individuals deem themselves dependent on an unavoidable society beyond their transformative capacities. Consequently, they see no option bar adaptation. The fear of 'alienated . . . institutions' leads to 'identification with [them]' (CoM 104; see also Adorno, Horkheimer *et al.* [1953] 1989b: 151). Socialisation is conditioned by *two* factors: people's dependence on society and their estranged experience of this society as unalterable.[20] Thus the aforementioned interconnections between exchange society's key aspects become clearer. While social dependence and estrangement drive integration, people's adjustment to the exchange principle and their undeviating reproduction of capitalism solidifies society and intensifies social estrangement and dependence.

In the formation of the other-directed person, Riesman (1953: 74) observes, 'the parental role diminishes in importance'. According to Adorno, family relations, formerly 'mediating . . . between individual and society', are disintegrating; society's power to seize 'the individual

[20] Adorno's explanation of integration generally is thus consistent with his aforementioned explanation of the workers' compliance with exploitative exchange due to their dependence on, and unawareness of, capitalist social relations.

directly' is growing (CoM 464, see also PETG 106). Due to the dominance of an autonomised society over the individual, sociology, Adorno argues, takes priority over psychology in analysing social phenomena (CM 230–1, 270, CoM 462, SSI 86). Yet the psychological dimension of his theory of integration adds to the sociological components. Adorno accepts Freud's (1961: 25) thesis that 'the ego seeks to bring the influence of the external world to bear upon the id . . . to substitute the reality principle for the pleasure principle'. The ego reacts to social reality, checks the individual's instinctual life and controls the individual's social adaptation (PETG 147, SP2 86): 'owing to . . . socialization . . ., we are forced to renounce our instinct – every day, at every moment' (HF 75). But capitalist society no longer allows for the formation of a strong ego in this process. 'The individual . . . can only survive by relinquishing its individuality, blurring the boundary between itself and its surroundings . . . *In large sectors of society there is no longer an "ego" in the traditional sense*' (CoM 462). For Adorno, the concept of superego plays an important role here. The ego, Freud argues (1961: 26–59), submits to the categorical imperative of the superego, which acts as a potentially unconscious force. Adorno emphasises that the superego contains 'social . . . commandments' and prohibitions, 'internalized' by the individual, which fuel the 'mechanisms of . . . "socialisation"' (IS 114–15).[21] Since the social constraint internalised as superego is unconscious, evading the subject's critical analysis, it can solidify into a quasi-irresistible instance. This facilitates social integration and the adoption of social roles.[22]

These considerations motivate Adorno's critique of Parsons. Parsons (1964: 337–8) identifies in the social structure a 'system of patterned expectations of . . . behaviour' which allows actions to be regulated in accordance with society's 'functional requirements'. These 'institutionalized roles . . . structure' the individual's 'superego content'. One 'measure' of a social system's 'integration', Parsons holds, 'is the coincidence of the patterns . . . introjected in the average superego' with the system's 'functional needs'. Adorno attacks Parsons's theorem for uncritically accepting, even welcoming, socialisation and counters: 'Repressive conditions, too, can be normatively sedimented in such a superego . . . The coincidence of the average superego and the functional needs of a social system,

[21] See Cook's (1996: 51 75) and Cavalletto's (2007: 138 43) discussions of these ideas in relation to the culture industry and fascism respectively, and their refutations of Jessica Benjamin's (1977) earlier interpretation.

[22] ND 267 70, 279, see also PETG 150, SP1 79 80, SP2 79 88.

namely those of its own perpetuation, is triumphantly achieved in Huxley's *Brave New World*' (SP1 70).

Integration and sociology's double character In the state of commensurate socialisation, the question of how to examine the integrative social whole encapsulating reality's every element acquires immense sociological weight for Adorno. He continues to argue for representing people's experience of an objective, invariant society. Firstly, people's confrontation with society as the coercive totality registered by Durkheim is an indispensable condition for their socialisation. Adorno portrays exchange society as a quasi-independent authority – 'permeating' all individuals – which extorts homogenisation, 'forc[ing] a ... negative identity of the universal and the particular' (SSI 186). Secondly, integration furthers society's reification and thereby intensifies estrangement. Capturing society's appearance as invariant object is sociologically fruitful for capturing estrangement as well as society's underlying petrifaction as major consequences of social integration. Durkheim's theory of social facts ends up distorting social conditions which, in reality, have merely 'become'. Yet the theory remains instructive, because it expresses that in the process of 'social institutionalisation and reification' these conditions have become 'overpowering' as 'second nature' (SSI 250). Marx's 'law[s] of nature', Adorno argues, are 'so-called' because they apply 'only' to the historical conditions of 'capitalist society' (ND 347). But as long as the 'dominant relations of production' are unconsciously, undeviatingly reproduced and function just like a natural mechanism, the laws according to which society's components operate will retain the 'character of ... unavoidability'. Moreover, the word nature critically articulates that even the latest stage of '[h]uman history' as 'advancing domination of nature', solidified into second nature, 'perpetuates the unconscious [history] of [first] nature, eating and being eaten': violence and suffering (ND 348–9).

However, the notion of society as objective, invariant force is also misleading. It conceals that social mechanisms are carried out by individuals. Where 'form[s] of socialisation' are imagined as 'unavoidab[le]', Adorno warns, 'one easily forgets what is decisive': that such forms were 'created by humans for humans' (SSI 445). The commodity world – 'the ... inhumanity of the *Brave New World*' – 'is ... a relation between human beings unaware of itself, social labour' (P 113). People's lack of awareness partly conditions their calamitous integration. Hence Adorno demands that sociology recognise even the integrative whole as an historical context produced and maintained – no matter how blindly – by individuals. According to Weber (1978: 4) sociology aims, not only for 'the interpretive understanding of social action and thereby ... a causal

explanation of its course and consequences', but also for the reduction of social constellations to actions of individual humans (1978: 13). Adorno distils an implicit 'moment of truth' from Weber's 'subjectivis[t] ... reduction of institutions'. Weber reminds sociology that even the 'congealed, objectified conditions autonomised vis-à-vis humans are ... relationships between ... humans' (IS 82), a 'human product' (S 146). Marx, Adorno continues, strives to divest society of its ostensibly natural existence.

> [C]riticism ensures that what has become loses the appearance of its being in itself [Ansichseins] and stands revealed as the product of history. This is essentially the procedure of Marxist critique ... [which] consists in showing that every conceiv able social and economic factor that appears to be part of nature is in fact some thing that has evolved historically. (HF 135 6)

Correspondingly, the 'structural laws' examined by the 'dialectical theory of society' – including Marx's laws of value, accumulation and social collapse – are 'tendencies that follow, more or less strictly, from the historical constituents of the overall system' (CLA 112). Since this system is historical and could be changed, Marx's 'assumption of natural laws', Adorno cautions, cannot be taken 'à la lettre'. Marx calls these laws mystifications; they could be abolished just like the society in which they apply (ND 348; see also Marx 1976: 771). Adorno concurs: 'social law-like regularities differ constitutively from natural-scientific ones ... through the form of their own historicity' (IS 147).

Adorno ends up mediating between Durkheim and Weber (see also Jay 1984a: 101–4; Rose 1978: 82–3) and insisting on the double character of sociological examinations of exchange society. Weber's approach, Adorno maintains, is as insightful as it is myopic. Not only does Adorno deny that social relations *between* humans can be exhaustively reduced to individual attributes. Currently, social relations downright conceal their human and historical reality. Weber one-sidedly neglects society where it is contrary to identification and understanding (S 147), an estranged social constellation fossilised by unfailing socially reproductive action conforming to the exchange principle. The 'ingenious' aspect of Durkheim's theory of social facts and constraint, Adorno holds, is that it testifies to society where it 'confronts us as something strange, objectified, reified ... in express contrast to [the] idea of understanding social motivations' (PETG 151). Sociology cannot ignore capitalism's 'thing-like, objectified forms', the autonomised 'institutions' of 'congealed action', 'which one cannot immediately resolve into action' (IS 105). These forms also limit sociology's decipherment of society as a human, historical context. Such a decipherment is possible only through considerable

interpretive efforts – and, currently, repeatedly unsuccessful.[23] But, contra Durkheim, sociology's recognition of those limitations must not lead it to renounce the attempt to decipher society. Sociology must sustain both moments. It must reckon with the appearance of an invariant objectivity in an effort to register estrangement and, importantly, the underlying whole in its thing-like operation. Simultaneously, it must seek to understand this petrified whole as historically produced and maintained by a collective of individuals who could change it. The elusiveness of this omnipresent exchange society to the concept is becoming increasingly evident.

Integrated consciousness

Weber (1978: 4–24) defines social action as behaviour to which actors attach meaning and which is oriented by the behaviour of others. The more rational an actor was in carrying out an action, the better the chance that sociologists, by means of their own rational faculty, will be able to understand the meaning the actor attached to the action and to explain its course. Adorno agrees that a subject can empathise with the inner domain of another's action. Yet this is mainly because the socialisation process has adapted every agent's subjective thinking to the same socially established thought patterns. Its privileged role in Weber's methodology highlights that rationality has become people's primary 'organ' of social adjustment (PETG 16, 153–4). The social integration of individual consciousness is a vital dimension in Adorno's examination of capitalist society and deserves separate attention.

Identity thinking extended Socialisation involves the adaptation of the individual's entire 'living activity' to the exchange principle which governs capitalist relations of production. Physical and mental activity, Adorno speculates, were only separated historically (CM 262). Both originated as human modes of intervening in material reality. 'Even in its intellectual form, labor is also an elongated arm to provide the means of life' (HTS 22). Labour's 'relationship . . . with its material' remains the 'originary image' of thinking (ND 30). Accordingly, for Adorno, the trajectory of the integration of labour and life also traces the adjustment of human thought.

Durkheim is therefore right to assert that *society* thinks 'through individual minds' (1953: 25–6), through mythology, reason and truth (1983: 67–8, 87–8, 97–8), and through the categories of subjective understanding (1995: 8–18). The intellect, argues Adorno, is adapted

[23] Chapters 3 and 5 will come back to this.

to socially prevalent modes of reasoning: ‘everything through which [the bearer of consciousness] is constituted specifically as a cognitive subject, . . . the logical universality that governs his thinking, is, as the Durkheim school . . . has shown, . . . social in essence’ (HTS 63). If, for Hegelian philosophy, history’s driving force, reason, constitutes the substance of individual consciousness; and if history strives to realise the unification of the particular will with the will of the universal, then the *Weltgeist* (world spirit) framing Hegel’s philosophy of history reveals the negative truth about consciousness in capitalism. Due to social integration individual consciousness certainly reflects the universality. Yet consciousness is not reconciled with, but rather completely adjusted to, the ‘totally socialised society’ (ND 309, see also 295). The alignment of the particular and the universal has been realised, but in contrast to the ‘hope of philosophy’ (S 152). Society regulates thought like it regulates all life: ‘the individual is blindly subjected to the universal’ (PD 78). Thus subjective thought is also homogenised. Social adjustment erodes the differences between thinking individuals; ‘consciousness . . . is levelled out’ (Adorno 1991a: 121). Subjects ‘are presented as relatively equal, endowed with the same reason . . . as atoms . . ., dequalified’ (IS 30). Every individual consciousness is assimilated to the same socially sanctioned principles of thought.

A considerable portion of Adorno’s sociological writings focuses on the mode of thinking subjects adopt through socialisation. The social origin of the estranged consciousness has been discussed above. I also mentioned Adorno’s argument that commodity exchange requires the exchanging parties to adopt identity thinking: to render different products and forms of labour equivalent and to accept the concept of exchange value, ‘a mental configuration’ (PD 80), as congruent with reality. Adorno takes his argument a crucial step further than Marx. For Adorno, social integration ensures that all human life and thought are entangled in the web of exchange. As a consequence, the individual’s entire thinking constantly abides by the principle of identification. In contemporary capitalism, identity thinking does not guide people’s conception of products alone, but their conceptions of all objects and living beings. Identification underpins *any* form of thought that renders different elements of objective reality equivalent with reference to a single category. Racial classifications, which represent individuals as identical in accordance with the conceptual definition of a group, and also the notion of universal human equality, demonstrate the current prevalence of the identity principle (MM 102–3). Exchange society is ‘ruled by equivalence . . .’, ‘mak[ing] the dissimilar comparable by reducing it to abstract quantities’ (DE 4). Furthermore, the identification principle characterises *any* thought that accepts categories originating in the intellectual activity of social

subjects as identical with reality. Exchange value is one of those categories. Accepting that the people of a particular group naturally share certain conceptually defined characteristics also means mentally executing the principle of identity thinking. The socialisation process leads the subject to adopt identification as its single mode of thought.

Intellectual integration and sociology's double character For Adorno, the dissemination of identity thinking constitutes a major component of the 'extension of the exchange relation throughout the entirety of life' (1991a: 110). This legitimates the question how sociology can examine exchange society as an institution of intellectual socialisation. The individual's estranged experience of society as an objective, invariant force plays a vital role in social integration. Correspondingly, Adorno argues that under the pressure of a society on which they really depend and which appears to them as an absolute authority, individuals 'tread along, stooped and with their heads lowered' (PETG 70), unable to gain perspectives alternative to those approved by society. Durkheim's (1995: 400) study of piacular rites, which explains mourning 'not as the spontaneous expression of individual emotions', but as 'an obligation imposed by the group', already hints at the power with which a thing-like whole can enforce the mind's adaptation (ND 320n). Durkheim's notion that 'logical propositions' reflect the 'order of generational and property relations', which confronts the individual as '[o]bligatory', 'estranged', 'valid in itself' and 'coercive', is equally instructive (AE 76). Durkheim's sociological concepts – 'social fact' and, especially in this context, 'collective consciousness'[24] – tell of a capitalist society whose 'impenetrab[le] ... norm' (SSI 240) incessantly forces itself on individual thought. The image of society as an objectivity imposing itself on the mind is not merely the illusion of an estranged consciousness, but also indicative of a de facto reified, solidified, integrated society exempted from individual resistance.

However, Adorno immediately criticises the image of society as objectivity, emphasising that the conditions and relations that engulf consciousness are maintained and could be altered by humans themselves (ND 191). Durkheim is criticised for blocking this analytical step:

> Even the Durkheimian concept of collective consciousness, eminently reifying intellectual phenomena, has its truth content in the constraint which the social mores are exerting; it is just that this constraint would, in turn, have to be derived from the relations of domination in the real life process, not to be accepted as something finally existent, as a thing. (PD 63 4)

[24] For critical discussions, see Hagens 2006; Rose 1978: 84 6.

This passage echoes Adorno's earlier intervention against Durkheim. Yet in the context of the socialisation of thought, his intervention also reveals a further, specifically intellectual dimension. Adorno underlines not only that society's perpetuation hinges entirely on human actions, but also that people's adherence to socially approved *thinking* is a vital requirement for the reproduction of exchange relations. Firstly, as long as people keep thinking of society as a natural fact they must adapt to, rather than as an alterable context, they will refrain from changing it. Secondly, the identification of qualitatively different products and individual achievements as examples of general kinds is necessary for maintaining commodity exchange relations. Exchange society, Adorno emphasises, needs to be understood as a product of socialised life activity *tout court*, including socialised thinking. Ideology 'ceases just to perch on the infrastructure'; it 'sustains the entire mechanism' (HF 119, see also ND 149, 348). This is partly why the socialisation of the intellect is such a prominent theme in Adorno's sociological work.

The double character of Adorno's sociology emerges in his analyses of estrangement, of dependence and of the integration of life and thought. In relation to all three major aspects of exchange society, Adorno accentuates its appearance as an objective, invariant authority in order to underline society's reification and petrifaction in integration. Simultaneously, he maintains throughout that exchange society is reproduced by the actions and thoughts of humans: the 'work' of dialectical sociology 'consists precisely in fixing the concept of society, not as an invariant, but as something dynamic in itself' (SoI 184). While a deeper understanding of Adorno's sociology hinges on grasping its double character, it is also undeniable that from the double perspective of this sociology, the social condition sociologists are supposed to examine escapes their efforts to pin it down conceptually.

Essence and epiphenomena

Society's omnipresence and persistent elusiveness is doubtless one of the reasons why the question of analysing society is so persistent in Adorno's *oeuvre*, especially in his sociology. This helps explain why his inquiries into the problems and potential of sociological examinations of exchange society are so thoroughgoing. Adorno's inquiries need to be followed into his 1930s critique of phenomenology, where he first used the term 'essence' (*Wesen*) consistently in social analysis. Adorno's employment of this term elucidates his notion that sociologists should turn to the details of social life in exchange society and provides decisive clues about how these details might be deciphered.

Essence in social thought

Husserl (1983) assigns to phenomenology the task of describing pure consciousness, the absolute, essential possibilities of consciousness to posit reality. Reality is strictly dependent upon its constitution by consciousness. Husserl's approach, Adorno emphasises (1940: 12), hinges on the method of 'categorial intuition' developed in Husserl's (1970a, 1970b) earlier work. There, Husserl proposes to grasp the essential principles of knowledge – universal, notably logical verities – without recourse to empirical psychology. Much like objects corresponding to nominal terms of statements are given to perception, the ideal correlates of formal terms ('and', 'or', 'if' etc.) should be given to a non-sensuous intuitive act. Adorno maintains that Husserl cannot make the act of categorial intuition plausible. Phenomenology must presuppose the truth of logical principles that categorial intuition should evince (VSI 76–82; 1940: 15–16). Adorno regards this as phenomenology's model problem (VSI 70). The notion of an absolute consciousness independent of the world – which is supposed to depend on consciousness instead – cannot be upheld either (VSI 64–5, 100–8). The logical steps in Adorno's philosophical argument and Horkheimer's critique of it (A&H1 423–31) cannot be detailed here. Crucially, though, Adorno argues that despite phenomenology's failure, its concepts inadvertently offer a diagnosis of capitalist society.

Husserl's term 'essence' is particularly instructive. While the notion of absolute essences regulating subjective thought is untenable, it articulates that even so-called 'free thinking' is 'dependent on an instance which is absolutised by Husserl, but would reveal itself to further analysis as that of society' (VSI 90). The latter, Adorno adds, confronts individuals as 'an opaque, haphazard social process to which [they are] delivered up' (VSI 112). Similarly, although Husserl's contention that all reality is relative to ideal essences is implausible, capitalism's integrative social '"system" so utterly determines all putatively individual objects that' – as phenomenology's corresponding approach suggests – 'the system can indeed be read off every singular feature as its "essence"' (VSI 81). The mode of passive registration (see VSI 58) articulates a state in which the individual, fully adapted as a 'social product', merely accepts the 'world by which he is dominated without residue' (VSI 64). Finally, phenomenology tells of a petrified society which appears just like an absolute, eternal instance. Its fundamentals express '[t]he human ... in its inhumanity ... perfectly strange to the human being, in which he is unable to recognise himself' (VSI 98).

However, true to his double perspective on social reality, Adorno immediately qualifies his remarks. Reckoning with absolute principles

governing thinking, Husserl 'reifi[es] . . . subjective labour' (VSI 58) and 'eternalis[es] the . . . temporal' (VSI 96).[25] The method of merely registering putative essences jettisons from the first the 'theoretical critique of [the world's] claim to being essential' (VSI 88). Although this is not obvious to individuals, the authority determining thought is not absolute but contemporary society as it is maintained by humans. Nor is it invariant: 'the condition of the possibility of all meaning, . . . even of formal-logical meaning, lies in [the] real history . . . of society' (VSI 92–3). From this perspective, too, society proves omnipresent and evasive. Social analysis must reckon with an integrative context reified to the point of befalling estranged individuals as absolute, unceasing essence. And yet – Adorno adopts a formulation of the early Marx (1970: 134) – thought must be enabled to '"play to these petrified conditions their own melody in order to make them dance"' (VSI 93).

Society in the smallest

Sociologists may find Adorno's critique of phenomenology for reifying social life problematic. Adorno mentions (IS 52), but does not discuss, the sociological frameworks of contemporaries like Schütz (1967), which, although oriented by phenomenology, are much more resistant to the charge of reification. Another key source of Schütz's is Weber, whom Adorno has been shown to mobilise against reifying social thought. Adorno's neglect of phenomenological sociology is particularly puzzling because his 1930s critique of Husserl reverberates in his 1950s and 1960s considerations of sociological research practice. Adorno's use of the term 'essence' clarifies his thoughts on the selection of social phenomena for research and on the sociologist's initial strategy for interpreting them.

The structures of an omnipresent society, Adorno holds, cannot be grasped directly as a whole, but must be examined through society's specific empirical manifestations (SSI 185). However, since integration leaves 'nothing under the sun that is not social', 'there is . . . "nothing between heaven and earth" . . . which cannot be considered sociologically' (IS 102). '[S]ociology . . . extends onto every . . . possible subject matter' (1972: 127), rather than being defined by a demarcated research object. Sociologists must constantly work out which phenomena are 'socially' and sociologically 'relevant' (IS 16). But sociologists need not and should not (IS 19) accept sociology's conventional big issues as its obvious concerns. Reproducing schemata of scientific importance approved by

[25] Adorno's conception of thought as labour draws on Horkheimer (1995: 28 9, 211 13) and Sohn Rethel (Adorno and Sohn Rethel 1991: 13 14).

the existing social order, Adorno warns, might inhibit its critical inspection (MM 125). Moreover, the stubborn glance at what is generally deemed sociologically significant blinds itself to instances of social life that only appear trivial, but actually manifest potentially dangerous social tendencies. Veblen – Adorno's key reference here – consciously seeks out everyday practices usually 'shielded . . . from . . . economic discussion' due to their 'homely' familiarity (1994b: v). He shows that ostensibly negligible leisure class habits, such as wearing corsets or carrying a walking stick (1994b: 111, 164), express a sexist, stratified culture of institutionalised invidious pecuniary distinction. Veblen (1994b: 155–60), Adorno emphasises (P 80, see also 76), demonstrates that putative epiphenomena like sports constitute 'outbursts of violence [and] oppression'.

Hence Adorno proposes a shift of sociological attention towards the 'apparently out-of-the-way . . . phenomena' (IS 17) among 'social specifics' (PD 110). Adorno knows that although their reasons for doing so may have been different, several other thinkers before him already tackled ephemeral details for gaining insights of wider bearing. Simmel (1999: 68–70), for instance, demands that sociology deal not only with 'big organs' (states, classes, churches, guilds) but also with the 'tissues', the seemingly *geringfügige* – insignificant, little, trifling – relational forms and modes of reciprocities between humans: a fleeting exchange of looks, asking for directions etc. Similarly, Kracauer, whose influence on Adorno will be clarified in the next chapter, points sociology and social critique to culture's 'inconspicuous surface-level expressions' and 'unheeded impulses' (1995: 75), to the 'exoticism' (1998: 29) and 'inconspicuous dreadfulness' (1998: 101) of daily life. Freud's 'immersion in detail', Adorno (PD 47) continues, has also procured a 'wealth of new social knowledge'. Freud (1991: 52) accentuates the psychoanalyst's interest in the 'dregs . . . of the world of phenomena', in those 'inconsiderable events' – from slips of the tongue to mislaying something – 'put aside by the other sciences as too unimportant [geringfügig]'.[26] Adorno's 'prince of dwarfs' (VSI 171), finally, is Benjamin. In Benjamin's 'interpolation[27] in the smallest', e.g. in *One-way Street* (1996: 444–88), 'a cell of intuited reality weighs as much as . . . the rest of the whole world' (NLII 222–3).[28]

[26] Adorno (1977: 128) deems Freud's 'tur[n]' to phenomenal dregs 'vali[d] beyond . . . psychoanalysis', e.g. for sociology (IS 17), utopian thought (1960: 15) and art (P 251).

[27] 'Calculation of values lying in between known values of a function' (Duden 1990 s.v. *Interpolation*).

[28] Frisby (1985) specifies the methodological significance of the fragments of social reality for Simmel, Kracauer and Benjamin's examinations of modernity.

Adorno's demand to shift sociological attention to epiphenomena does not fully explain why this shift is conducive to examining the social whole. His employment of the term 'essence' provides clarification: 'Today ... a thing is essentially [wesentlich] only what it is under the dominant malfeasance [Unwesen[29]]; essence [Wesen] something negative' (JA 130); 'essence is always already malfeasance, the organisation of the world' (ND 169). Adorno's passages articulate that in conditions of social integration, every detail of reality is so relative to one authority, it seems determined by an absolute essence. This, Adorno tells his sociology students, is phenomenology's 'element of truth' (IS 22). Contra phenomenology, however, what appears as essential is really 'malfeasance': not an ideal fundament, but the coercive organisation of exchange society and its governing principle. It has assimilated all of reality's facets so decisively that it 'drearily returns in the detail'. This is why Adorno thinks that in the 'detail oftentimes something decisive about the universal comes up'. Since every 'individual phenomenon contains in itself the entire society' (PD 39–40), sociology can make even the putatively most trifling situations and phenomena relevant for examining the social whole. Adorno's devices for deciphering the social content of individual phenomena, as will be illustrated shortly, are the concepts and ideas informing his theory of exchange society discussed earlier.

Sociologists investigating social specifics, Adorno argues accordingly, should deal with 'the essential' (IS 16). He even proposes a 'phenomenology' of the 'administered world' (ISW 239). Yet what he means is an interpretation of 'social phenomena as an expression of society, much as one may interpret a face as an expression of what of the psychical is occurring in it' (IS 146). A sociological investigation of social details in respect of their essence is instructive for discerning from these details a reified, solidified society conditioning dependence and estrangement. Capitalism's all-encompassing 'relations of production' have come to operate like 'second nature' and 'appear to be essence', Adorno sets out both images (CLA 121). However, 'the essence of social phenomena ... is largely nothing other than history stored up in the phenomena' (IS 146). Discerning 'the essential' from an epiphenomenon is misleading, unless it culminates in an awareness of the 'historical conditions, under which the phenomenon has come into being, and which [it] ... expresses and articulates in so many ways' (IS 22). Thus interpretations of social minutiae in the service of examining exchange society cannot but sustain sociology's problematic double perspective:

[29] I use Pickford's (CM 3) translation of *Unwesen*, which literally means 'anti essence' and could be rendered as 'nuisance' or 'pest'. On 'essence'/'non essence' see also Rose 1978: 101 2.

'the totality ... is inside everything without letting itself be apprehended [dingfest machen] in the usual sense' (SoI 192).

Sociology of the smallest

Many of Adorno's postwar examinations of exchange society follow these recommendations for sociological research. They illustrate his approach to selecting and interpreting social phenomena and demonstrate the diversity of its applications in his sociology. *Minima Moralia*, Adorno's collection of some 150 short essays and aphorisms from the 1940s, draws inspiration from his observations of minute details of daily life recorded in exile. Each study culminates in 'considerations of wider social and anthropological scope'. This procedure is possible, Adorno explains, because today 'society is essentially the substance of the individual' (MM 17). 'He who wishes to experience the truth about immediate life must scrutinize its estranged form, the objective powers that determine individual existence even in its most hidden recesses' (MM 15). In this respect, *Minima Moralia*, which is usually considered a contribution to Adorno's philosophy, especially ethics (e.g. Bernstein 2001: 40–74; Thomson 2006: 87–93), may legitimately be read as sociology. After all, Adorno points out to his parents, his book primarily explores 'what has become of "life" ... in conditions of monopoly capitalism' (2006c: 236; see also Honneth 2005b: 178).

Adorno's observation of walking constitutes a case in point. The bourgeois individual, the heir of 'the feudal promenade', was distinguished by a calm rhythm of walking. The stroll signalled the individual's liberation from the ritual and natural confines that necessitated 'ceremonial pacing, roofless wandering, breathless flight'. Today, running replaces walking. 'He must look ahead, can hardly glance back without stumbling, as if treading the shadow of a foe'. The running posture, Adorno argues, marks those terrified by the 'unleashed powers of life'. Their fear is generated by a society that confronts them as once only 'wild animals' did. He who 'run[s] after a bus' as though his life hinged on catching it illustrates the nervous insecurity of humans dependent on seemingly autonomous, irresponsive institutions (MM 162). At the same time, the fragment emphasises the transformations in postures over time, indicating that the social conditions of walking, experienced as threatening nature, are historical.[30]

A short text from *Miscellanea*, guided by a similar approach, seeks to articulate how social dependence and estrangement put the individual under intense pressure to integrate. Around New Year's Eve of 1951, a

[30] See Hewitt 2001: 80 2, on the somatic aspects of this fragment.

popular German newspaper jokingly asked its authors when they would like to have lived. The gag proved 'Almost Too Serious'.[31] Instead of letting their fantasies roam free, Adorno reports, the respondents spoiled the game and declared – Auschwitz still looming over them – 'their will to remain what one is' (VSII 567). Although statistically unrepresentative, as Adorno stresses, the response is a telling testament of integration: 'The coercion of adaptation to what is given in an overpowering manner has grown to such an extent . . . that, even if desire still comes to pass, it is now hardly possible for it to rise above the repetition of the ever-same' (VSII 568–9). The pressure to assimilate has crushed the resistance of people's actions, hearts and minds. Yet the intellectuals' fatalism also places the coercive whole into an ambiguous perspective. They are ashamed to express the desire for a happier condition because they sense that humans alone would be responsible for bringing it about (VSII 570).

Social integration entails the individual's entanglement in commodity exchange for profit. *Minima Moralia* seeks to illustrate this with reference to a range of mundane details. Once a form of passionate asceticism, avarice, for instance, has been reduced to 'think[ing] in equivalents', the obsession to 'giv[e] less than one receives . . ., yet enough to ensure that one receives something' (MM 35). Presents and donations used to involve effort for another's happiness. Today, the giver meticulously scrutinises his budget and the expenditure, treating himself and the other as calculable value and their interrelationship as one between things (MM 42–3). The conflict between calculations and immediate reciprocation has been resolved: reciprocation is now solely meant to prevent ruptures 'in the chain of exchange acts whereby expenses are recovered' (MM 38). Children, Adorno observes, are so used to these practices that when they receive gifts, their countenance expresses their suspicion of a 'nonsensical' breach of 'the exchange principle' and their expectation to be 'trick[ed]' into buying something (MM 42).

Mauss does not question the current predominance of commodity exchange relations. But apart from disputing that gifts were ever voluntary and disinterested, Mauss (1990; see also Carrier 1995: 19–38) insists that modern society still knows gift practices irreducible to capitalist principles. These practices originated in an archaic system of social relations where giving abundantly conferred honour and gift exchange established enduring social bonds. *Minima Moralia* was written two decades after Mauss's influential 'Essay on the Gift', one decade after Adorno (A&B 197, 212) became familiar with the Mauss-inspired works of Caillois and

[31] Adorno's text appeared in that newspaper shortly after *Minima Moralia* was published.

Bataille, and at a time when he and Horkheimer were consulting Mauss's theory of magic and mana (DE 11, 17). A critical engagement with Mauss could have sharpened Adorno's arguments on contemporary exchange relations and might have allowed him to demonstrate that his diagnosis of gift-giving in integrative capitalism is less sweeping than it sounds.

In America, Adorno continues, the commodity principle has seized the most hidden 'human relations' (2009b: 151). Whereas in Europe doubts about 'whether the human being was made merely to exchange' survive, in the States cash is unquestioningly accepted for personal favours, and even rich parents have no qualms about their children's taking on a paper route. All 'services' are treated as 'exchange value' (MM 195). Yet immigrants adjust quickly. The girl he met on the subway, Adorno is confident, cold-shouldered his flirtatious smile because she saw that he did not own a car. She refused to enter into a relation that showed no potential for a profitable exchange. '[H]er beauty' had become an object reserved for trading with 'powerful bosses, busy relief organisations, impatient relatives': 'the price we have to pay for life is that we must not live any more, not lose ourselves for an instant without exchange and cunning' (VSII 586).[32]

Minima Moralia bears witness to a world whose every facet is determined by the exchange principle. Adorno deplores this condition, but also sees it as creating a strategic advantage for sociological research. In social integration, the key aspects of society no longer only appear in phenomena 'conventionally' studied by sociologists, but can be discerned from even the smallest, out-of-the-way details of daily life. One evening in 1951, novelist Thomas Mann (in Bernard and Raulff 2003: 127) noted his reaction to Adorno's meditations: 'Diffused and extremely nervous. Feeling imprisoned in a world of harm from which no escape'. This understandable reaction to *Minima Moralia* also foreshadows a problematic aspect of Adorno's social research. By Adorno's methodological standards, social analysis is supposed to 'grasp things which present themselves as being-there and . . . naturally given in their having-become' (IS 146). Adorno's fragments often mention that the practices observed have developed in contemporary capitalism. He also frequently emphasises that humans themselves reproduce social relations. But he repeatedly fails to suggest that they could do otherwise and historically transform the fossilised capitalist condition. This predicament besets more of Adorno's substantive sociological work than his methodological writings might lead one to expect.[33]

[32] Written in 1940 and published posthumously, Adorno's sketch *No Adventure* belongs to the context of *Minima Moralia*.

[33] See Chapters 3 and 4 and the Conclusion.

Reified consciousness

'If there ... is no right life in the false one', as Adorno argued in *Minima Moralia*, 'then', he emphasises sixteen years later, 'there can ... be no right consciousness in it either' (CM 120, see also MM 39). This formulation echoes the sociologist's special interest in socialised thinking. Adorno's 1960s *Critical Models* – two collections of essays and lectures entitled *Interventions* and *Catchwords* – are among his most thoroughgoing sociological inquiries into what he calls 'reified consciousness'.[34] Reified consciousness belongs to a subject confronted with an apparently objective social world. Its thinking conforms to capitalist society's intellectual conventions, notably the principle of identification. Reified consciousness cannot experience anything autonomously for what it is, due to the acceptance of stiff reductive categorisations as naturally valid and congruent with reality. Its intellectual operations function like an objective mechanism and it tends to treat the world as so many classifiable things.[35]

For Adorno, inquiries into intellectual phenomena are a sociological, rather than a purely philosophical or psychological endeavour. Firstly, estranged and identifying modes of thought constitute forces reproducing capitalist society. Secondly, Adorno offers another variant on his image, '[t]here is nothing under the sun ... which, in being mediated through human intelligence and ... thinking, is not ... socially mediated' (IS 15–16). Reified consciousness is aligned with the dominant relations of production (VSI 253); thinking is 'imbued with ... the whole of society' (IS 16). Hence sociological examinations of intellectual phenomena can simultaneously support the examination of exchange society.

Consistent with Adorno's strategy for selecting sociological research phenomena, many critical models focus on minute intellectual epiphenomena. Adorno's sources include observations of daily academic life, fleetingly stated attitudes, snippets of mass culture, single concepts and words he has stumbled across in newspapers and conversations – an array of 'ephemeral occasions' (CM 3) and 'somewhat arbitrarily chosen catchwords' (CM 126). By scrutinising their social dimension, Adorno endeavours to unearth 'the same malfeasance [Unwesen] on which everything particular depends' (CM 3) and which can therefore 'be crassly experienced every day' (ND 295).

In a discussion of phenomenology, Adorno mentions 'the physiognomic glance at intellectual matters' or 'facts' (ND 89). Adorno uses

[34] Originally, the term is Lukács's 1971a: 93.
[35] CM 25, 32 3, 108, 119 20, 222 3, 252 3, IS 149, PETG 212 13.

the term 'physiognomy' also in his sociological writings. There, physiognomy means analysing the outlines of, and hidden relations between, seemingly isolated phenomena in order to investigate the underlying instance determining them and their interconnections. Physiognomics is the study of surface phenomena as expressions or 'manifestations of a social structure' (1938: 17–18, see also CoM 60–74). Husserl's notion of an 'essence' investing thinking highlights that intellectual phenomena are suffused with a solidified power, which thinking subjects experience as absolute, and which sociologists can distil from those phenomena. Yet Adorno's sociological physiognomy of intellectual epiphenomena resists ascribing them to invariant powers (see also CoM 82–3, P 63). '[S]ocial physiognomy' means 'perceiv[ing] the having-become [das Gewordensein] in that which presents itself as merely being [ein bloß Seiendes]' (IS 146). Alerted to society's petrifaction, Adorno's investigations of intellectual epiphenomena nonetheless aim to unearth reified consciousness as a collective form of thinking belonging to capitalist social conditions maintained by humans.

'Philosophy and Teacher' illustrates this mode of procedure. The essay reports Adorno's observations of some of his philosophy examinees' intellectual reactions to their course and exams: their strenuous inquiries about exam procedures and regulations; an aspirant's false association between vitalism and expressionist art and her inability to engage with philosophy beyond the minimal requirements; the tendency to randomly apply fashionable existentialist concepts to dodge difficult issues; and the frequently repeated question whether students may, should, must use secondary literature (CM 25–8, 32–3). What these instances have in common is the candidates' uncritical reliance on conventional categories – 'cover, prescriptions, tracks' – characteristic of reified consciousness (CM 25). The students' mentality bears witness to people's dependence on an overpowering 'structure', which 'reduces the possibility of freedom to a minimum', makes them 'fee[l] . . . impoten[t]' (CM 34), and pushes them to surrender their autonomous consciousness and to assimilate it to the whole. However, Adorno adds, society's structural outgrowth is produced precisely by individuals who think according to 'compulsive conventionalism', accept generally available 'classification[s]' with no regard for specific matters and fail to challenge reality as it is (CM 27).

To 'illustrate . . . reified consciousness' further 'without . . . cumbersome philosophical deliberation', Adorno relates an observation he made during a conversation with one of his research colleagues: '[S]he . . . asked in a completely charming manner, "Dr Adorno, . . . are you an extrovert or an introvert?" It was as though she . . . was . . . thinking according to the model of cafeteria questions from questionnaires. She could subsume

herself under such rigid and prescribed categories'. The casual question reveals the contours of identification. Adorno's colleague was able to treat humans as equivalent things in strict adherence to prevailing categories. Since identity thinking is 'fostered by the overall social tendency' (CM 222), its occurrence in turn highlights intellectual socialisation. Echoing Simmel and Freud, Adorno's methodological writings reiterate the sociological potential of casually stated attitudes, fleeting gestures and informal conversations. Deciphering the *verschwindend Geringfügige*, that which seems so insignificant it is about to vanish from sight (SSI 194), allows sociology to gain instructive perspectives on the underlying social whole.

With equal determination, Adorno pursues the 'catchwords' he 'randomly selected'. Among these catchwords is the 'positively accepted concept of public opinion'. Opinions, Adorno states, are identifications symptomatic of reified consciousness: conventional conceptions which subjects claim to be objectively true (CM 105–6). The proliferation and stubbornness of opinions discloses an estranged, increasingly opaque society which makes individuals desperate for intellectual orientation. 'Deceptively, [an opinion] removes the strangeness between the . . . subject and the reality slipping away from it' (CM 110). The individual 'has no genuine relation to the matter', 'recoils from its strangeness and coldness' and is content with reproducing society's 'congealed' opinions (CM 120). Adorno acknowledges the individual's experience of an objective, autonomous, overpowering society, but he also seeks to challenge it. The inability to question the dominant social order's intellectual forms fosters precisely its perpetuation and solidification: 'he who leaves the world, in which one is looking for one's spot, as it is, confirms it as the true being' (CM 121).

Adorno's 1967 sketch on *Uromi*,[36] a common German moniker for great-grandmothers, which he stumbled across in an obituary, shows that the seemingly most innocent catchwords can yield the most disconcerting insights. Not only does *Uromi*, the 'formula for love', dishonour the dead. Reminiscent of a 'corporate acronym', the concept already treats the living woman like a dead thing. The fact that the mourning relatives had the best intentions for using *Uromi* only demonstrates how solid, unrecognisable and irresistible the social force behind intellectual phenomena has become (VSII 571).

Adorno's critical models further underline that exchange society's characteristics can be discerned from every detail of social life. Adorno

[36] Collected in *Miscellanea*.

scrutinises intellectual epiphenomena with regards to reified consciousness and in view of the underlying social context. In accordance with his sociology's double character, Adorno's texts accentuate a solidified society which estranged individuals experience as objective, invariant, natural. But Adorno also repeatedly attempts to emphasise that individuals alone, however automatically, reproduce the social whole in their acting and thinking, and that society is a historical product. Sociology continues to confront the dilemma that its central concern, exchange society, is omnipresent but resistant to conceptualisation. Understanding Adorno's approach to this problem depends on a deeper inquiry into his theoretical analyses of social life. Chapters 3 and 4 aim for such an inquiry. First, however, the issue of acquiring sociological material through immediate observation requires closer attention.

2 Sociological material

The notion that Adorno's thinking is theoretically driven while 'intuition [Anschauung] plays a relatively subordinate role' (Geuss 2005: 50) is familiar. Judging by writings such as *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, *Negative Dialectics* and *Aesthetic Theory*, it is evident too. A shift of attention to Adorno's sociological output will not lead to an out-and-out refutation of this judgement. Yet it motivates a closer look at the issue. Adorno's work on the problems and potentials of sociological examinations of exchange society deals with their empirical as well as their theoretical dimension. Both dimensions came into view towards the end of the previous chapter. Before returning to theoretical interpretation in the next chapter, it is necessary to explore the rough terrain that is the empirical domain of Adorno's sociology.

Saturated sociology

Sociological investigations of exchange society, Adorno insists, require factual material drawn from empirical observation. The contention that he is 'not a proponent of empirical research' (Hagens 2006: 228) is problematic. It is true, as Chapter 3 will explain, that Adorno considers insights established by observations of social life untrustworthy. He calls direct encounters with the empirical world primary – basic, initial – reactions (CM 221, SDE 52–3) and the products of empirical observation 'primary material' (SSI 511) or 'simple social material' (IS 85). Nonetheless, Adorno's sociologico-methodological work from the 1950s and 1960s raises an explicit demand for sociological material. What makes the empirical domain of Adorno's sociology difficult to capture is his occasionally unbalanced, sometimes hazy advice on how sociological observation can best establish empirical material.

Demand for material

Adorno's caveat that empirical observations cannot yield trustworthy representations of reality does not silence his demand for empirical

material. Sociological 'reflection' without factual content to reflect 'upon' (IS 109) is 'empty' (PETG 25). Facts may be 'appearances', but society can only be examined through its specific manifestations, and 'the universal does not manifest itself . . . other than through the facts' (SoI 184, see also PETG 84). Consequently, sociology cannot rely on theoretical constructs alone, but must deal with 'concrete moments' (IS 17) to 'saturat[e] itself with material' (PD 76). '[D]ialectical sociology' is not a 'self-satisfying system of thoughts' (SoI 184). Primary perceptions of social phenomena, direct observations securing the 'primary acquisition' of empirical content (IS 109), are sociologically indispensable.

Purely theoretical social analyses hovering 'above the matter', Adorno explains, provide 'in advance the answer to any question with which one is confronted by the material' (IS 109). Predetermined answers usually fail to account for the variety and the details of the materials established by observations of social life. A sociology which 'evade[s] the facts' or 'bend[s] them . . . to satisfy some preconceived thesis' will 'lapse into dogmatism' (CLA 113). Hence 'the step towards the essence' should not be 'taken . . . on the basis of fixed conceptions brought to the phenomena from outside, but from out of the phenomena themselves' (SSI 485). Sociology must immerse itself in, remain 'in closest touch with' (IS 51), and undergo 'continual self-examination against' (PETG 179), factual material.

Adorno's epistemological meditations affirm the importance of empirical data to cognition *tout court*. Consistent with his conception of intellectual 'activity', Adorno asserts that thinking is labouring on something (ND 178, 201). This lends weight to Kant's (1999: 193) dictum that '[t]houghts without content are empty'. Reflections purified of factual material, Adorno argues, are indeed void (ND 214) and curl up in navel-gazing (CM 130). Although such references are problematic, thinking with reference to empirical content is fruitful thinking. 'The inner depth of the subject consists in nothing other than the delicacy and richness of the outer perceptual world' (DE 155–6).

'Whenever [philosophy] was master of itself', Adorno continues, 'it dealt with the historically existent as its object' (ND 141). Philosophy, too, must 'immerse itself in . . . material contents' (CM 134). Belittling the material 'moment' of perception, phenomenology exemplifies a dogmatic unwillingness to deal with content, a recession into thought and the conduct of 'risk-free', 'non-obligatory' intellectual exercises (AE 149–51). This does not mean that philosophers must consult archives or carry out ethnographies, surveys and experiments. A philosophy of history severed from 'primary' historical encounters would certainly be 'foolish' (HF 21) and could benefit from considering sociological

'material' (1977: 130). But there are specific ways of fulfilling this requirement in philosophy in that concepts themselves are material. Philosophy can materially saturate itself by closely engaging with concepts and texts. This is partly why Adorno's philosophy focuses so insistently on the writings of Kierkegaard, Husserl, Hegel or Heidegger. Even parts of *Negative Dialectics*, chiefly a 'justification' for Adorno's philosophical 'mode of procedure' (Adorno *et al.* 2003: 555), aim to obtain content in this way.

The '[p]ure immediacy' of perception is also aesthetically indispensable (Adorno 1999: 69) – although it does not fulfil aesthetic experience either, and can, without subsequent reflection, be uncritical and misleading (see 1976: 50–1). Genuine experiences of music require a moment of suddenly being overwhelmed. If explanation cleared this moment away, it would explain away the individual work itself (GS15 192). Illustrating the aesthetic significance of perception's somatic component, Adorno writes:

> Only if the sound is 'larger' . . . than the individual so as to enable him to 'enter' the door of the sound as he would enter through the door of a cathedral, may he . . . become aware of the possibility of merging with the totality . . . To 'enter' a symphony means to listen to it . . . as something around one. (1979: 118 19)[1]

Similarly, in 'the first movement of the Hammerklaviersonata, after the passage in B, when the main theme explodes with the low f sharp', emerges 'one of the greatest passages in Beethoven. It has something oversized . . . through which the proportion to the individual's body is totally abolished' (1998a: 65).

Sociology, Adorno concludes, has an important empirical dimension (SSI 538–9). Sociological examinations of exchange society certainly depend on a theory of society, but they also require – indeed must immerse themselves in – sociological material obtained by observations of social life. Crossing the line between theoretical and empirical research, Adorno's sociology takes an uncompromising stand against the division of labour in social science. Adorno understands that such boundaries are socially guarded, but sociologists cannot simply bow to them.

Obtaining material

These considerations raise the question how empirical observations of social phenomena should obtain empirical material. Adorno broaches this

[1] While the notion of 'absorption' has a broad horizon of meaning in Adorno's work (see Sherratt 2002: 165 8, 194 205), here 'symphonic absorption' means immediate percep tion overwhelmed by somatic feeling. Aesthetic reception's 'most primitive fact' is the artwork's 'proportion to the human body' (1979: 117 18).

question without offering many definitive guidelines. It is useful to begin with his argument that empirical research need not be synonymous with method-guided research because observations using empirical methods are not necessarily the most suitable observations for establishing sociological material.[2] It is then possible to spell out his case for a mode of observation oriented by the phenomena and to adumbrate his suggestions for alternative ways of gathering data.

Adorno's main criticism of much empirical social research is that it insulates itself against theoretical analysis and thus fails to tackle social conditions that cannot be empirically determined. This may lead one to overlook his doubts about the ability of some empirical research to meet sociology's empirical task. Adorno's late work in particular contains several passages criticising the rigid application of certain empirical *methods* for potentially fettering the very encounters with social phenomena whose acquisition of sociological material the methods are meant to assist. While the 'empiricis[t] ... emphasis on empirical sources' aims for insights not immediately exhaustible by intellectual preconceptions (MCP 141), Adorno argues that the 'humblest reason' can anticipate the material results where observations implement empirical 'control measures' (GS4 297).

Firstly, the application of methods threatens to reduce the horizon of observation to their predetermined scope, leaving the phenomenon's material elements that lie beyond it by the wayside. In interviews, surveys and questionnaires, Adorno alleges, questions are frequently so rigidly defined, they merely establish 'that the percentage of tuberculosis sufferers in a slum district is higher than on Park Avenue' (GS4 297). A less polemical passage states that the 'free interview', which largely allows the interviewee to determine the course of the conversation, the 'schema of questions', and the 'questionnaire completely schematised with prescribed response categories' form a continuum towards an ever narrower empirical scope and, eventually, the incapacitation of observation to register any of the respondents' 'spontaneous reactions' (GS9.2 334–5). Even the assimilated, homogenised individuals of capitalism, the authors of *Group Experiment* point out, still have 'vague', 'differentiated', 'fluctuating', 'ambivalen[t]' and 'contradictory' opinions on some issues. These opinions threaten to be overheard if researchers apply rigorously defined interview schemata, 'survey procedure[s]' or 'multiple-choice'-style questionnaires

[2] Adorno (AE 154) seems to use the word 'empirical' in its broad Kantian (1999: 155) sense: it describes an 'intuition ... related to the object through sensation'. The German adjective *empirisch* simply means '[arisen] from experience, observation' (Duden 1990 s.v.).

(GEX 27–8). The stiff application of instruments dependent on 'clear and unambiguous' categories runs the danger of allowing the method, 'through its own formulation', to 'decid[e] what the object is' (PD 73). Indeed, in many empirical sociological studies, 'empiry' is confined 'so much, compared with the open richness which this concept once meant, that ultimately only what is trimmed by methodology, adjusted to it, is still registered' (SSI 185). '[T]he concentration on ever . . . craftier methods', 'the monstrously polished . . . methodical apparatus' and 'the most advanced mathematical equipment', Adorno snipes, coincide with 'the complete scantiness and irrelevance of the results' (PETG 175). Some sociologists are said to 'obey the primacy of the method and not that of the matter' to the point where phenomena which cannot be treated by extant methods are altogether excluded from examination (PD 109, see also GS9.2 358). Others let 'the interest in verifying or falsifying a method as usable', rather than the goal of establishing new insights into social life, determine what they investigate (PETG 167). Adorno's shift of sociological focus to 'out-of-the-way' phenomena may have fuelled some his worries about such methodological restrictions.

Secondly, for Adorno 'natural science['s] . . . triumph' in 'reduc[ing] phenomena to . . . units' (PETG 28) would be no triumph in social science. Adorno seeks to engage with the details of social life. He criticises 'studies which simply apply . . . existing instruments of research over and over again, or . . . apply the same instruments to different problems or areas of subject matter', for several reasons (IS 20). One reason seems to be that the same methods employed in observations of several distinct empirical phenomena may lower the capacity of those observations to register the phenomena's various material minutiae (see A&K 411–12). 'Even in front of the television screen', Adorno remarks, 'individuals' and their reactions under observation are not as equivalent as 'atom[s]' and their behaviour. Rather, where the same instruments are applied in different situations, the sensitivity of observations to nuances in opinions and reactions is limited. Thus it is the 'generality' and 'limited range' of the 'questions' directed at different 'individuals' that 'prepares in advance what is to be ascertained – the opinions to be investigated – in such a manner that it becomes an atom' (PD 78). The 'material' established by a 'schematised questionnaire', for instance, is 'quantifiable', but it is also restricted to 'data abstracting from what is individual' (GS9.2 334–5). Correspondingly, Adorno questions the priority of establishing 'quantitative knowledge', which meets the criteria of 'mathematical stringency', 'reliability' and 'generaliz[ation]', over a 'refined, discriminating' qualitative approach, which aims for an 'abundance of specific, concrete insights' and 'detailed

information' on single cases (IS 74).[3] Sometimes 'materials fall to empirical social research'[4] which 'resist their preparation and evaluation according to ... established methods'. This is due to 'the specific quality of sociological matters', Adorno speculates, 'which do not fit as unbrokenly into mathematical, natural-scientific modes of procedure as it is postulated where one insists on the rigorous development of sociological methodology' (GS9.2 395). Many of Adorno's comments on empirical research methods develop his more general critique of social analyses in which 'rigorous prescriptions' are prioritised over substance (SSI 263).

I hasten to add that Adorno's evaluation of research methods is difficult to grasp overall. As I will elaborate shortly, he often commented favourably on some method-led research and occasionally used authorised devices himself. What the above criticisms reveal, however, is a conviction Adorno held throughout his career: empirical social research is not exhaustible by method-guided research. Adorno justifies empirical research partly with the argument that a sociology above the facts will dogmatically skate over their variety and nuances. Similarly, he worries that empirical research driven by predefined methods surrenders to methodical constraint at the expense of content. Methods potentially reduce an observation's horizon and – especially when applied to different phenomena – its sensitivity to empirical minutiae, and limit the sociological material's breadth and richness in detail.

Adorno's approach to empirical social research was consistently informed by the conviction that there is only one way of avoiding this twofold problem with methods. Adorno expressly mistrusts abstract methods modelled independently of, and subsequently applied to, individual social phenomena (1976: vii, IS 84): 'a true method ... unrelentingly reflects ... upon itself by dint of its relationship to the matter' (PETG 175). To obtain the full array of sociological material, including specific empirical details of phenomena, sociologists must constantly examine and adjust their procedures of observation and data-gathering in light of the phenomena under scrutiny (IS 69, 73). Kracauer, Adorno emphasises, was right to perceive contemporary culture 'in closest touch with [the phenomena]', without handling them briskly from above by 'sticking

[3] This point resonates with Adorno's demand for musicology: 'Whoever would pass judgment must face squarely the irreplaceable questions and antagonisms of the individual compositional structure, about which no general music theory, no music history teaches' (1973c: 8).

[4] 'Fall to' translates *zufallen*. *Zufällig* means 'accidental'. For Adorno, conceptually inexhaustible insights are accidental insights, which interest him the most (MCP 141, cf. SSI 496).

social labels onto them' (VSI 195). Erwin Scheuch (1969: 154), Adorno's colleague at the German Society for Sociology, argues that sociological research should remain strictly within its instruments' boundaries. Regardless of how sociologists go about establishing empirical material, 'the method', Adorno counters (IS 72, see also 20), 'must stand in a living relationship to', and 'must . . . be developed from', the 'subject matter'.

Correspondingly, Adorno outlines no universally applicable sets of research methods. His positive recommendations for observing social life might even be read as somewhat vague. Yet one point, which crystallises in two separate contexts, is worth highlighting and can be sharpened with reference to Adorno's intellectual sources: the individual's personal encounters with social reality have the potential to enhance sociology's endeavour to obtain sociological material.

Research technicians, Adorno argues, perceive social phenomena solely trough 'pre-existing methods' (IS 21). They represent an alarming trend:

> The more complex and sensitive the social, economic, and scientific apparatus, to the operation of which the system of production has . . . attuned the body, the more impoverished are the immediate experiences [Erlebnisse] of which it is capable . . . The regression of the masses . . . is the inability to hear with their own ears what has not already been heard, to touch with their hands what has not previously been grasped. (DE 28)

'[A]utonomous' researchers, by contrast, keep developing their own 'problems[,] . . . techniques and methods' through their own insights into specific social phenomena (IS 21). This constant readjustment of observational procedures creates the opportunity to register more of the 'open richness' – with regards to breadth and detail – of sociological material than any pregiven, rigidly applied methods could do.

Again, Adorno's key reference is Kracauer. Instead of making of 'experience' a 'method', Kracauer, Adorno writes, was 'determined to think only what he could fill with substance, what had become concretised for himself in humans and things' (NLII 60–1). Kracauer's (1998) 1930 study of white-collar workers, Adorno (NLII 67–8) emphasises, 'tried . . . to balance the demand for empiry with the requirement that the result be meaningful' in a 'planned but unsystematic way'. Kracauer 'used . . . interviews [Interviews], but no standardised interview schemata [Befragungsschemata]; he flexibly nestled up to the conversational situation', adjusting his approach to the phenomena. Adorno associates Kracauer's 'procedure' with that 'of the participant observer' emerging in America at that time. Frisby (1985: 161–2) counters that Kracauer's methodologically unorthodox study resists even this comparison. Indeed, the pioneer of participant research among Adorno's acquaintances was

the Viennese sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld. Lazarsfeld's 1933 *Marienthal* study involved a 'sociographic experiment' with quantitative and qualitative methods, especially participant observation and interviews, for collecting data on the experience of long-term unemployment in a Lower Austrian village. Lazarsfeld (Jahoda *et al.* 1975: 11) demarcated his more methodical experiment from the 'occasional observations of daily life' which had previously informed much German sociology. Lazarsfeld would have probably seen Kracauer's work as affinitive with that sociology. Kracauer's short book – and this is partly how it left its mark on Adorno (see A&K 207, 218–19) – established its broad variety of empirical details chiefly through individual case studies based on the author's own direct encounters with interpersonal and linguistic behaviour, sociomaterial environments, conversations and texts.

Adorno also underscores the empirical richness of Benjamin's *oeuvre*, likening him to 'an animal collecting provisions in its cheeks' (VSI 176). Although intuited reality is incongruent with the truth and subject to scrutiny, interpretation, Benjamin holds, must decrypt empirical phenomena from within, instead of approaching them with measures from without.[5] Thought cannot simply follow a deductive chain, but must repeatedly interrupt itself and return to even the slightest of phenomena (1998: 28, 32–4, 44–5; see also Adorno 1995: 65–71). Benjamin, Adorno states, does not construct a system through pure thinking, but forms his ideas with continuous reference to materials, 'unreservedly ... succumb[ing]' to the 'material layer[s]' of different historical and literary phenomena in order to grasp their truth content from within them (NLII 225, see also VSI 169). The material abundance of Benjamin's thinking stems from the subject's own observations, which maintain a high sensitivity to empirical detail and a wide horizon. According to Adorno, Benjamin strives for a close, literally 'bodily touch with the materials' (NLII 221). His endorsement of Benjamin's concern for minutiae has been mentioned. Benjamin's concern is manifest in *One Way Street* (1996: 444–88), for example. In the *Trauerspiel* study, Benjamin (1998: 57) argues that 'the whole range of subject matter should be disinterestedly observed'. 'The entire creation', Adorno remarks, 'becomes for Benjamin a text which must be deciphered while the code is unknown' (NLII 225). Benjamin 'immerse[s] himself without reserve in the manifold' (P 241).

[5] Benjamin rejected the application of pregiven categories to artworks, for instance. Thus he evaded a trend in early twentieth century aesthetics reported by Lukács (1971b: 13): to 'form general synthetic concepts on the basis of only a few characteristics ... of a school, a period, etc., then to proceed by deduction from these generalizations to the analysis of individual phenomena'. This procedure threatens to force artworks 'into a conceptual straitjacket' and to 'distor[t] them'.

The empirical potential of the individual's personal encounters with social reality is underscored from another angle. For Adorno, perceptions contain both conceptual reconstructions of reality – as will become clearer in the next chapter – and sensations. In sensation, perception retains a 'corporeal feeling' (ND 193–4). This 'somatic' moment reverberates in cognition as its 'disquiet' (ND 203). The sense-datum stimulates cognition and fuels the productivity of thought. Cognition requires an instant in which 'thought gives itself up without reservation to the overwhelming impression' (DE 156). The intensification of perception's somatic moment is physical pain (AE 155).

'[T]here are', Adorno warns, 'no isolated sensuous data to which one can point and say: "*Voilà* – that is society"' (IS 35–6). Yet he denies that perception cannot capture anything of society at all. Adorno owns up to having previously overlooked certain moments in which 'individual phenomena' enable preliminary, poor, but sociologically relevant, perceptions of the whole (IS 49). These concrete instances might serve as 'immediate indices of . . . society'. More specifically, there are situations in which one can 'feel society . . . on one's skin',[6] 'on one's own body'; 'observe' and 'sense' society immediately. More specifically still, society makes itself felt in situations of individual suffering. Society is 'immediately perceptible where it hurts' (IS 36–7). In situations of 'resistance', when society confronts one as particularly obdurate, when one 'sink[s] into a viscous mass' (IS 50) or 'runs into a brick wall' – for instance when wanting to borrow money and 'meet[ing] with a "No" ten or twenty times in a definite, automated manner' (IS 36); when 'biting on granite' as a jobseeker and 'end[ing] up having to do something that is not at all to [one's] liking'; or, more drastically, when experiencing discrimination and the threat of 'liquidation' – one begins to sense the coagulated social whole. In these painful situations of being 'harnessed to an objective trend', the individual can have sociologically relevant 'immediate' perceptions of social reality (HF 17–18). To jobseekers who must do what they do not want to do, the coercion to adapt to the almighty exchange principle and 'sell' themselves 'on the market' is immediately noticeable (PETG 98). Of course, no primary confrontation with capitalist society can make its key aspects obvious, let alone fully transparent. Nevertheless, direct encounters, whose somatic moment is painfully intensified by social reality, constitute an instructive empirical source for sociology. Adorno – to emphasise this – has in mind the individual's

[6] The exceptional role of the somatic in this passage renders the official translation, 'on the receiving end of society', problematic (IS 36).

own, personal perceptions.[7] In Kracauer's empirically rich sociology, suffering – the 'impact' of 'solid things' – 'entered into the thought . . . in undistorted, unmitigated form . . . Kracauer seemed . . . a man with no skin' (NLII 59–60).

Writing twenty-seven years after Kracauer's white-collar workers study, Adorno admits that due to their methodological constitution, many investigations require teamwork (statisticians, interviewers etc.). Yet Adorno – once involved in collaborative research himself, as will be shown – is unconvinced by the merits of teamwork. Its division of labour, the mutual control of research steps and group adjustment are said to 'streamlin[e]' studies. Teamwork 'grind[s] off' the 'edges' of specific insights; it dispenses with anything that the individual has perceived without having conceptually anticipated it already (SSI 494–6). This is consistent with Adorno's maintaining that their advantages make individual, personal encounters with social reality conducive, even indispensable, to obtaining sociological material. 'As problematic as, vis-à-vis the universally mediated society, theses about the latter resting solely on the immediate experience of individuals – immediate, precisely in the sense of the protocol sentences[8] of current scientific theory – may have become: without the moment of primary sociological experience, no insight forms at all' (SSI 185).

In search of material

In Adorno's earliest academic work, his epistemological studies of the 1920s (GS1 7–322), factual material played no important role. Adorno's early aesthetics did engage with empirical phenomena, namely music and literature, but – as he retrospectively diagnoses – harped on psychological aspects expressed in art (Adorno and Berg 2005: 59). Simultaneously, Adorno began to engage with several social thinkers – Simmel,[9] Bloch,

[7] Mentioning the threatening experience of discrimination, Adorno means his own con frontation with the Gestapo in the early 1930s (ND 296, see also Müller Doohm 2009: 178).

[8] The definition and epistemological status of protocol sentences have been topics of com plex debates. One definition, which seems to be relevant here, can be found in Carnap (1931: 438): 'The simplest sentences of *protocol language* refer to the given; they describe the immediate contents of experience or phenomena, i.e. the simplest cognisable facts.' Adorno's emphasis on *personal* encounters, in turn, evokes Neurath's (1932 3: 207 8) interjection that complete protocol sentences contain the name of the observing person. The logical positivists' disputes about the certainty of protocol sentences would have been particularly significant for Adorno's sociology. Unfortunately, his remarks on these dis cussions are desultory.

[9] In 1961, Adorno (PD 110) would still foreground Simmel's 'immers[ion] . . . in such social specifics as the stranger' (Simmel 1950: 402 9).

Lukács, Kracauer, Benjamin. These very different thinkers, Adorno recalls, were all determined to address matters of empirical reality. Their 'generation ... worked itself out of the then dominant ... formal idealism ... and recognised that ... so-called fundamental philosophical questions could ... be tackled ... only with material content' (VSI 195–6, see also 175; NLII 213). Kracauer (1998: 32) described observation as a 'legitimate counterblow against idealism', which had lost sight of 'life'. Adorno became convinced that an analysis of social reality which would deal with factual data provided by empirical observation was also one of his own most pressing tasks. While Adorno remained certain of this from the late 1920s until the end of his life, his views on how observation should obtain empirical material fluctuated significantly over the years.

Auscultating social life

Adorno's public lectures of the early 1930s described the contact between philosophy and empirical science established by logical positivism as 'one of the most fortunate' intellectual developments of the recent past. Only confrontations with the empirical world could provide philosophical inquiries into the status quo with 'material content and concretion of problems' (1977: 126). 'Natural-historical questions', for instance, 'are not possible as general structures' (INH 262). The 'idea[s] of nature and ... history ... gather around a concrete historical facticity' (INH 264).

At that time, Adorno's social research was relying on two empirical sources. Both would, in various ways, shape his subsequent sociological work. Adorno's 'musical content analys[e]s' (CM 220) experimented with music as sociological material. His 1936 'sociological interpretation of jazz' (CM 217), the empirical dimension of which enthused Kracauer (A&K 319), is well known.[10] Although it appears to combine rebellious and conventional musical components, jazz, Adorno observed (2002a: 470–1, 477–81, 483–4), only permits superficial, schematic deviations which leave the conventional whole untouched: syncopations generally conform to the basic rhythm; expressive elements such as vibratos shake but never break the stiff sound; harmonic digressions (e.g. 'blue notes') are harmless and formulaic; improvisations constitute mere ornaments following defined patterns; even virtuosic performances fail to alter the compositions. Jazz pieces, Adorno concluded, are commodities rigorously standardised for exchange. Their putative variations only veil their uniformity for marketability (2002a: 471–3, 477–9). Jazz is typical of the

[10] For discussions of Adorno's work on jazz see Müller Doohm 2009: 199 203, Witkin 1998: 160 80 and articles in Section III of Delanty 2004b.

culture of capitalist society, which develops productive forces synchronously with fettering them and coerces – socially produced – individuality into assimilating (2002a: 478–9, 484–6, 491).

What is easily missed is that in the early 1930s, Adorno also occasionally drew on personal encounters with daily life in order to obtain empirical sociological material. A 1931 fragment recounts his observation of a man who ‘lost’ his loved one ‘to insanity’. After mourning her and scouring her letters for signs of the illness, the man got involved with another woman. This was not because he had forgotten his ‘true and only love’, required distraction or had become indifferent. The world governed by exchange for profit simply did not allow him to waste the opportunity. Another fragment is inspired by Adorno’s observations of coughing. If a cough sounds important, as though it prepared a speech instead of manifesting poor health, it is likely to be the cough of a member of the upper class. Elaborate coughing, a form of self-examination to restore health and order, is characteristic of the petty bourgeoisie. Proletarian coughing is unreflective, void of any special meaning or connection with the future, a means ‘for clearing the lung from dust’: ‘even our life’s animal expressions are signs of social differences’ (VSII 538–9). Adorno deemed these pieces important to his work at the time and sought Kracauer’s approval (A&K 284–5). The influence of Kracauer’s *Weimar Essays* (1995; see also A&K 223, 236, 286), a series of case studies inspired by fleeting observations of minute aspects of public environments, urban interiors and mass culture, is unmistakable indeed. The impact of Benjamin can also be noticed here, of Benjamin the ‘physiognomist *en passant*’, ‘immers[ed] within . . . quotidian experiences’ and ‘feel[ing] his way through’ the city in ‘tactile proximity’ (Gilloch 2002: 93). Finally, Adorno’s fragments resonate with Simmel’s ‘apparently intuitive approach to the object’, which avoided any ‘excessive concern with [methodology]’ (Frisby 1981: 68–9).

Radio project

True to the growing relevance of factual material in his examinations of exchange society, Adorno became increasingly sympathetic towards empirical sociology’s opposition to ‘freely hovering reflection’. However, in the late 1930s, his outlook on obtaining material changed. Adorno began to advocate empirical *methods* for gathering data, hoping they might enrich his thoughts on experience (A&H2 427, CM 219).[11] Adorno first attempted to conduct method-guided research right upon

[11] Unlike Adorno, the Institute had already worked with empirical methods before World War II (see Jay 1996: 113 42; Müller Doohm 1996: 39 44).

arriving in America. Between 1938 and 1940, he collaborated with Lazarsfeld, who had left Austria in 1933, on the Princeton Radio Research Project. Adorno asked how radio transmission transformed the quality and reception of music (1979: 110–11, A&H2 503–20). He aimed for an intimate empirical investigation of radio content and listeners' reactions with the help of established research devices.

Adorno's initial plans for a sustained employment of such devices remained unrealised. In examining radio content, he attended to factual material, e.g. symphonic (1979) and popular music (1941). But Adorno applied no authorised – and least of all, quantitative – social research methods. His approach resembled his earlier content analysis of jazz. The essay, 'On Popular Music', for instance, considers the harmonics, rhythms and lyrics of hit compositions as well as additional factors of radio plugging such as 'pseudo-expert terminology'. Popular radio music, as diagnosed by Adorno, is 'standardised'. Its individual features, e.g. 'breaks' or 'dirty notes', are merely superficial, schematic deviations which, together with a rigorous plugging apparatus, ensure commercial viability (1941: 17–32).[12] Such statements, Hohendahl (1995: 139–42) suggests, show that even Adorno's content research of pop music, unlike his inquiries into autonomous art or Wagner's work, was informed by insufficient empirical breadth and depth to avoid interpretive inflexibility. Yet Adorno's 'antipathy to ... survey methods' does not seem to have been 'fully formed by that time' (Witkin 2003: 117). His growing interest in using authorised methods is documented by his proposals for obtaining additional material through: systematic programme classifications (1938: 18–22), numerical studies of what stations select as content (A&H2 515), tests of different radio sets (1938: 31) and patent lists, and questionnaires for, as well as interviews with, physicists, sound-control engineers, schools for technicians, radio music experts and musicians (1938: 22–43, A&H2 506).

Adorno's plans for method-guided observations of listeners also failed to materialise (CM 223, 227). Apart from a few small experiments (CoM 399–412), he only completed document analyses – e.g. of fan-mail addressed to radio stations (1938: 16, A&H2 524–8, CoM 105–10), which he 'read ... very carefully' (1945: 214), but without using any specific methods. Overall Adorno's radio research prioritised material provided by radio content over inquiries into listeners, because radio allegedly shaped its reception (A&H2 428–30). Yet Adorno 'was not complacent towards' methods; it is questionable that he 'found ... empirical methods anathematic and confining' and 'saw little value' in 'polling

[12] Adorno's ensuing considerations on exchange society are discussed in Chapter 3.

listening habits' (Gibson and Rubin 2002: 8). Adorno warned that the Radio Project's programme analyser device, which required subjects to push buttons while listening to pieces of music to indicate their preferences, dislikes etc., was too simplistic to resolve the phenomenon of radio consumption (CM 220). But despite his criticism of extant approaches, Adorno was considering using methods to gather material about listeners. His imprecise instructions suggest controlled observations and experiments (once adequate methods were developed) (CoM 413–50), elaborate interviews – partly while subjects were listening to the radio – and questionnaires (CoM 456–60). His aim was to determine life histories, personal characteristics and attitudes, conscious reasons for listening, dialling and switching off routines, concentration span, emotional reactions, awareness of radio-specific sound quality, and whether subjects were eating, drinking, smoking or conversing while listening (1938: 5–21, 28–32, A&H2 506–11, 520–4). Adorno never successfully employed empirical methods in the radio study, which raises suspicions about the potential of his methodological proposals. But his interest in using methods for obtaining sociological material seems honest. Methodological compromises for adjusting to American academic conventions may have been necessary (CM 223), but Adorno did not deem such compromises pointless.

F-scale

Adorno's failure to realise method-guided research did not make him give up on methods for collecting data. Quite the contrary, *The Authoritarian Personality*[13] of the late 1940s, which Adorno co-authored, depended on several research devices. The study investigated 'the *potentially fascistic* individual ... susceptible to anti-democratic propaganda' (AP 1). His work strengthened Adorno's view that 'rigid thinking ... from above' (CM 231) needed to be counteracted by research in 'closest contact' with sociological 'materials' (CM 242) and that empirical methods could help acquire such material.

Adorno and his colleagues required data such as statements of opinions and beliefs which would reveal patterns of prejudice and help understand their connections to personality. What makes *The Authoritarian Personality* materially rich, Adorno claims (CM 235, see also SSI 543), is its combination of mutually independent research methods: various

[13] Part of a multi volume inquiry into prejudice by the Institute and its affiliates (see Held 1980: 138 47; Jay 1996: 219 52; Müller Doohm 1996: 78 94; Wiggershaus 1994: 408 30).

questionnaires, clinical-psychological interviews and tests. To broaden the range of material, the questionnaires contained projective questions in addition to scale items and factual questions; interviewers were asked to adjust their detailed interviews to the respective situation and allow respondents to develop themes spontaneously; and the tests used stimuli which encouraged subjects to elaborate (AP 13–19, 303–4).

Adorno was directly involved in tackling perhaps the tightest constraint to material scope. In the 1940s, American respondents could hardly be expected to speak freely about their antidemocratic or racist beliefs. They needed to be approached with an instrument that 'measure[d] prejudice without appearing to have this aim' (AP 279). Subjects were asked to evaluate a series of 'give-away' statements: the famous 'F-scale'. Although these 'items' contained no explicitly fascist or anti-Semitic ideas, the respondents' evaluations were supposed to disclose attitudinal patterns[14] which – with the help of interviews and tests – could then be related to nine 'trends' of the potentially fascist personality: conventionalism, authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression, anti-intraception, superstition/stereotypy, power/toughness, destructiveness/cynicism, projectivity and an over-concern with sex (AP 15–16, 224–42). For example, subjects were asked to assess the statement: 'Familiarity breeds contempt.' Agreement indicated that 'the hostility is so generalized, so free of direction against any particular object, that the individual need not feel accountable for it'. This was attributed to a destructive/cynical disposition (AP 238–9). Similarly, agreement with the statement, 'No insult to our honour should ever go unpunished,' could indicate authoritarian aggression and power/toughness (AP 232, 237). The researchers, argues Adorno, thus allowed the matter to shape the methods rather than letting the methods dominate the study (PETG 167–8).

The Authoritarian Personality attracted severe methodological criticism. Hyman and Sheatsley (1954) alleged that the authors generalised findings on attitude organisation and its connections with personality from an unrepresentative sample to other population segments and failed to control for the impact of education on opinion statements. Moreover, some of the instruments determined the results: since certain exercises required respondents to agree or disagree with 'items', prejudiced subjects necessarily appeared to lack 'qualified opinions'; scales for measuring ethnocentrism, political conservatism and authoritarianism overlapped, leading researchers to overstate the correlation between these ideological patterns; and the interviewers' knowledge of their interviewees'

[14] On Adorno's distinction between 'conscious opinions' and 'sedimented' attitudes, see (GS9.2 332).

questionnaire scores introduced bias into the response material. Adorno additionally conceded the dilemma that the study's 'research instruments' actually 'presupposed' the 'theory' they were meant to 'validat[e]' (CM 236, see also SSI 542). These shortcomings simultaneously render *The Authoritarian Personality* prone to Adorno's aforementioned later critique of method-guided research for reducing the horizon of observations and their material to a predefined scope. '[B]eing once bitten, twice shy', Adorno eventually questioned the fruitfulness of repeated applications of the F-scale by other sociologists (IS 20). Nowhere are the fluctuations in Adorno's outlook on research methods over the years more evident than here.

Group Experiment

Already in 1945, Adorno had encouraged fellow émigrés to learn from American science how to combat the 'delusional moment' in German thinking (VSI 358). 'Delusional' described Germany's unempirical sociological tradition, which Lazarsfeld (1968: 270–1, see also 1972: 172–3) had also noted. Wiggershaus (1994: 451) calls this tradition *weltfremd*, unworldly (also: strange to, or absent from, the world) – incidentally a word used more optimistically by Weber to emphasise the merits of ideal types (1972: 10; 1978: 21). The 'residues of German intellectual-scientific [geisteswissenschaftliche] sociology', Adorno clarified in 1952, 'urgently require[d], as its corrective, empirical methods'. Roughly throughout the first half of the 1950s, Adorno, who had now returned to Germany, was one of the country's main advocates of the 'dissolution of . . . dogmatic and arbitrary theses' through method-guided research (SSI 481–2, see also GEX v). His favourable remarks on the role of qualitative and quantitative tools in social analyses (VSII 625) and his endorsement of public-opinion research, especially through focus groups (VSI 293–9), reflected his ongoing conviction that empirical methods supported observations in meeting sociology's demand for material.

In the early 1950s, Adorno participated in the Institute's Group Experiment, which investigated public and non-public (GEX xi) opinions – socially prevalent views steering individual beliefs (GEX 24) – on the occupiers, anti-Semitism, Nazism and related issues. The experiment, as an archived note by Adorno reveals, aimed for 'qualitative richness of material contra reduction to as few categories as possible', for a wider material scope than traditional methods like questionnaires with predesigned questions could achieve (A&H4 880). The study employed focus groups (GEX 32–41) in order to 'create a situation . . . free from the constraint of the questionnaire' (A&H4 880). Some 1,800 participants

were assembled in small circles in familiar environments to debate a stimulus text critical of the German population. Moderation was limited to stimulus questions (GEX 41–53, 501–14). The group discussions were meant to overcome limitations to spontaneous articulations of socially conditioned individual beliefs and expose views that only interaction could stimulate or make transparent. Debates were also supposed to establish minute variations in attitudes and encourage freedom of association so as to capture a multifaceted range of themes (GEX 32–8, see also GS9.2 338). '[D]iscussion without thematic restriction, possibility of free association, breadth of themes to be discussed', Adorno noted (A&H4 880). The researchers of the Group Experiment, he argued, managed to adjust the mode of observation to the specific material properties of the phenomenon, taking into account their own experiences with it (GS9.2 382, 388).

Adorno's interpretations of the responses examined the trans-subjectively[15] available stock of categories and arguments (GEX 20–5, 60–2) shaping individuals' defensive reactions to questions of responsibility for concentration camps, the extermination of the Jews, the war and the Nazi terror. Adorno later described these 'collective opinions' as '*faits sociaux* in Durkheim's sense': as 'autonomised' forces imposed upon individuals (GS9.2 397). Adorno found the available patterns offered people ways of evading responsibility by denying knowledge of the horror (GEX 285–300), negating guilt (GEX 300–20), exonerating and excusing themselves (GEX 320–38) and accusing other nations (GEX 350–70). Although *Group Experiment* did not inquire deeply into exchange society and its intellectual socialisation, it demonstrates Adorno's continuing endorsement and conduct of method-driven empirical sociology until the mid-1950s.

Qualitative content analysis

Adorno's writings between the late 1930s and mid-1950s offer quite a different perspective on how to acquire data, compared with his later scepticism of method-driven empirical observation. That said, even during those years, his demand for empirical research in sociology was never a dictate to use authorised devices. The Radio Project's empirical register included content analyses of music similar to Adorno's previous studies. In the 1940s and 1950s, he continued to work on sociological projects

[15] This concept, rare in Adorno's *oeuvre*, reappears in *Negative Dialectics*, denoting the socio intellectual conditions surrounding subjective thinking: 'individual consciousness ... is ... entwined in ... trans subjective objectivity' (ND 275).

which, unlike *The Authoritarian Personality* and *Group Experiment*, employed content analyses of 'products of the mind' – music, television and texts ranging from artworks to magazines – to provide sociology with empirical data and 'dra[w] social conclusions' from them. Adorno saw this approach as consistent with his interest in reified consciousness. Since ideologies were 'functions of the influence' of those products, rather than originating in the 'carriers', the empirical components of sociological inquiries into socialised thinking were better served by content analysis than by surveys of the content's consumers. The sociology of his time, he argued, was 'short-sighted' in focusing on polling individuals instead of examining 'stimuli' (IS 84–5, see also GS9.2 355–6).

In the mid-twentieth century, content analysis usually designated the *quantitative* approach to documents developed by American sociologists following Lasswell. It involved reading a text through a definite set of categories of textual elements (coding) for the purpose of classifying different textual motifs and numerically assessing their relative weight. Adorno, by contrast, pursued *qualitative* content analysis (IS 86–7), a procedure allegedly 'inaugurated' by Kracauer in opposition to 'pinpointing, quantifying method[s]' (NLII 67, see also A&K 465, VSI 195). Kracauer (1952–3: 631–5) warned that isolating and classifying textual motifs in order to count them led researchers to ignore those characteristics of a text that depended on the motifs' original configuration. Moreover, coding different textual motifs by means of a limited number of elementary categories was tantamount to forcing motifs under uniform covers: a simplifying manipulation insensitive to variations in detail. Adorno, too, was sceptical of applying 'classificatory schema[ta]' (IS 84) to intellectual phenomena. Rather than reading documents exclusively in terms of preconceived categories of scientific interest and reducing different aspects of texts to common denominators for numerical treatment, he proposed an 'analysis which immerses itself in the specifics of the material' (IS 88). He refused to 'restrict [him]self *a priori* to a mathematically structured analysis of a narrow range of manifest variables', aiming to remain 'open to a full range of interpretive experiences . . . and . . . highly sensitive to nuances of implication, paradox and double meanings' (Cavalletto 2007: 155). For Adorno, qualitative content analysis meant breaking a document down into its distinct items and dealing with its entire scope, including the items' configurations and minute details.

In the 1940s and 1950s, Adorno made several attempts to harness the potential of qualitative content analysis to fulfil sociology's demand for material without applying restrictive methodical frameworks. A brief overview of the empirical dimension of these studies illustrates his approach. In 1943, Adorno completed a 'critical, qualitative content

analys[i]s' of 'fascist' rhetoric. He conducted an in-depth case study of transcripts of American fundamentalist preacher Martin Luther Thomas's radio addresses. Adorno dissected the texts into their 'more or less standardized . . . stimuli' (CM 237) – some three dozen rhetorical devices and propaganda tricks – which included the agitator's self-portrayal as a 'lone wolf' (GS9.1 14–16) or 'messenger' (GS9.1 25–8), notions of a 'movement' (GS9.1 41–2) and 'unity' (GS9.1 57–60), or 'warnings' of communists, bankers (GS9.1 115–23) and Jews (GS9.1 130–40). He then proceeded to explore each stimulus in detail, before raising psychological and sociological questions about their functions when consumed by listeners in monopoly capitalism. Nine years later, Adorno produced a case study of 'highly concrete . . . tangible material' (GS9.2 12) drawn from astrological magazines and the *Los Angeles Times* astrology column over the course of four months. Like Thomas's transcripts, these texts were dismantled into various rhetorical 'tricks' of astrological advice (CM 238) – e.g. standard portrayals of relations with family, neighbours, friends, experts and higher-ups (SDE 133–52) – and their configurations – e.g. the division of days into 'a.m./p.m.' (SDE 89–105). Avoiding 'quantitativ[e]' examinations of 'the frequency of individual motifs and formulations' (GS9.2 12), Adorno treated each textual item in its own right in consideration of various facets[16] – 'a content analysis of my own heart', commented Kracauer (A&K 490). This allowed Adorno to inquire into the motifs' psychological and wider social significance. At around the same time, Adorno produced a content analysis of television programmes. In order to achieve 'close[ness] to the material' (1954: 213), he scrutinised thirty-four transcripts of TV plays 'of various genres and quality' (CM 59). Still refraining from reducing the scripts' different aspects to a catalogue of elements for numerical treatment, Adorno singled out specific motifs from each play, e.g. the comical portrayal of an intellectually gifted yet starving schoolteacher, the story of an old woman who had designated her cat as her heir or the belittling image of a brutal dictator (1954: 223–5, 230, CM 61–3). He then studied each 'socio-psychological stimul[us]' (1954: 213) in detail so as to unearth multiple 'layers of meaning' (1954: 221). The theoretical investigations sought to ascertain television's contribution to the socialisation of consciousness.

Adorno's content analyses diverged significantly from the widespread procedure of quantitative document research and from the more established methods (questionnaires, scales, interviews, focus groups) he had

[16] See Chapter 3 for further discussions of these studies.

proposed and employed in previous projects. His approach resonates with important tendencies in present-day empirical social research. Social science methodologists and ethnographers increasingly draw attention to the 'literate quality of many social settings' (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 133). Echoing Adorno's appeal to sociology from the mid-twentieth century, many sociologists have come to 'challeng[e] the curious primacy of interview data in social research' (Bauer 2000: 147), calling for a more persistent engagement with 'written material[s]' of 'self-documenting' social settings, such as records, diagnoses and rules (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 121). Present-day advocates of content analysis also share Adorno's interest in using this procedure 'for making inferences from a focal text to its social context' (Bauer 2000: 133; see also Krippendorff 2004: 18–43). Finally, ethnographers argue that even 'ephemeral' and 'banal' literary sources can be sociologically relevant because they are 'replete' with socially prevalent 'stereotypes, . . . stocks of common knowledge and conventional wisdom' (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 125). Their example, pulp and potboiler fiction, is the equivalent of Adorno's TV scripts and astrology columns.

Content analysis, its defenders claim, is empirically especially fruitful because it is 'unobtrusive': documents are 'naturally occurring' materials, which need not be produced by interviews or questionnaires (Bauer 2000: 148). Adorno might agree that content analysis is thus in less danger of letting sociological instruments preselect and predetermine sociological data. However, many scholars of today predominantly advocate *quantitative* content analysis, which occasions precisely the twofold material restriction Adorno finds problematic about some method-guided approaches. Firstly, quantitative content analysis depends on applying a 'coding frame' which comprises 'a predefined set of alternatives (code values)'. Different newspapers, for example, might be organised according to categories of size or format. The researcher 'interprets . . . text[s] only in the light of the coding frame' (Bauer 2000: 139). Adorno seeks to avoid letting the method reduce the observation's horizon and leaving by the wayside those aspects of a document that lie beyond the coding framework's scope. Secondly, quantitative content analysis hinges on formalising different textual items by means of code 'units' (Bauer 2000: 133). The 'scheme' is 'systematically applied to all selected texts of interest for the purpose of extracting uniform and standardized information' (Franzosi 2004: 550; see also Bauer 2000: 139). In its 'focus on frequencies', this procedure, as content analysts concede, 'neglects the rare and the absent' (Bauer 2000: 148) as well as specific variations between textual items conditioned by the 'subtleties of language' (Franzosi 2004: 550). Adorno, by contrast, guards social science against

numbing the sensitivity of empirical observation to the minutiae of social phenomena. An overly methodical, strictly statistical approach to 'printed . . . material', he argues (PETG 173), allows the method to take priority over the sociologist's 'primary relationship to the matter' – and thus over the matter itself. Where content analysis is employed as 'a technique for quantitative analysis of extensive texts' in the 'tradition of Lasswell' (Lindkvist 1981: 26; see also Franzosi 2004: 548, 556), Adorno's qualitative mode of obtaining empirical sociological material from textual sources remains an alternative approach.

Adorno's sociological treatment of texts could be seen as more affinitive with what in the decades after his death has come to be known as 'discourse analysis'. Many representatives of discourse analysis agree that they cannot offer a methodical 'recipe' (Potter 2004: 616, see also 607). 'Somewhere between "transcription" and "writing up", the essence of doing discourse analysis seems to slip away: ever elusive, it is never quite captured by descriptions of coding schemes, hypotheses and analytical schemata' (Gill 2000: 177). Discourse analysis requires 'sensitivity to the occasioned and action-oriented, situated, and constructed nature of discourse'. Hence '[d]ifferent kinds of studies involve different procedures'. These statements strongly reverberate with Adorno's suggestion that sociologists readjust their approach to different empirical phenomena. Furthermore, discourse analysts resist the 'temptation to move beyond the complexity of the original materials to listing of coding and cross-tabulations'. Similarly to Adorno, they 'sometimes' aim for sociological insight by 'working intensively with a single transcript' and 'attending to variations' and 'specifics of what is said and how it is said' (Potter 2004: 616). Adorno, it appears, pursued objectives similar to those of contemporary content analysis with an approach to empirical research comparable to discourse analysis.

Distance from methods

Adorno continued insisting that sociology required factual material established by empirical observation throughout his late work. From the mid-1950s onwards, however, his outlook on how such material was to be obtained changed in one respect. Whereas for the past decade and a half, he had been advocating and conducting method-guided research as one way of acquiring empirical data, his affirmation of methods was now destabilising.

Even after 1955, Adorno did not unequivocally reject research methods. He occasionally warned sociology against closing its mind to methods (SSI 539) and conceded their potential in the sociology of music

(1976: 227). At odds with his advocacy of qualitative content analysis, but consistent with his view that methods should be modelled according to the phenomena, Adorno deemed quantitative content research well equipped to tackle the rigidly standardised products of the culture industry (IS 87).[17] Sociologists, he suggested, could also benefit from social science's 'highly developed' sampling techniques (IS 73) and from new questionnaires for examining the impact of the mass media (IS 69). A numerical treatment might well be appropriate for those products' homogenised consumers (PD 74–5; see also Honneth 1991: 70–1; Bonß 1983: 218) and natural-scientifically oriented sociological methods for their undeviating, largely reactive behaviour (see Ritsert 1983: 229). – As mentioned, elsewhere Adorno questioned precisely this point. – One passage still states that method-guided social research could test and refute '[n]umerous ... assertions of social theories' (PD 79).

However, Adorno's growing mistrust of research methods at that time cannot be concealed. Undermining his concessions to quantitative content analysis, he argued that mass cultural products equally justified a qualitative approach, because a detailed case study of one standardised phenomenon would reveal as much as examining several of them (CM 59–60). In accordance with his notion that the social whole could be studied through its minutiae, he also questioned the necessity of quantitative studies of large numbers of individuals. From his 'radically sociological' perspective, qualitatively examined 'attitudes, ingrained viewpoints, entrenched opinions, ideologies' were 'social facts from the outset': the 'seemingly individual' datum had 'general value', i.e. could be made to reveal the wider social context that conditioned it (IS 75). Although Adorno's sociology lectures still suggested the fertility of empirical methods and advised students to familiarise themselves with them by trying them out, he now placed noticeable emphasis on the problems of various forms of method-guided research. I mentioned his worries about letting methods reduce the horizon and sensitivity of empirical observations and the scope of sociological material in both range and detail. Adorno also sensed a growing tendency to rigidify methods without reflection on their relationship with the subject matter. So as to be 'replicable', experiments, for instance, were restricted to so few variables – 'depart[ing] so far from social reality' – that they threatened to become irrelevant (IS 100). More importantly, Adorno emphasised that the research reported in *The Authoritarian Personality*, oriented by Likert's scaling technique, had operated with ambiguous items which could be

[17] Only a qualitative approach could do justice to creations from outside the culture industry (GS9.2 355 6, IS 87 8).

related to several subsyndromes of the larger character structure under investigation. Recent instruments following Guttman's work, however, defined items narrowly, relating each to only one syndrome abstracted from the structure and postulating that agreement with an item implied agreement with less 'extreme' ones. Methodological exactness, Adorno argued, was achieved at the expense of content (CM 234, GS9.2 348, IS 73–4, 90–2). The increasingly supercilious tone of his statements on methodical social research, many of which contained no discernible methodological arguments any more, is especially conspicuous. His colleagues and some of his students, Adorno complained, had developed a 'scientific fetishism' which prioritised 'the cultivated method' as a 'value' in itself (PETG 172). To describe this supposed methods 'cult', he related a conversation with a 'famous American empirical social researche[r]' who had confessed that 'as a sociologist, he was . . . not interested in any specific subject matter at all, but . . . only in . . . methodology' (PETG 168–9). German sociology's new 'fascination with method' even became the subject of Adorno's ridicule. Having perhaps contributed to this fascination after returning from America, he now inveighed against researchers whom methods enticed like other American novelties 'such as blue jeans or Beat records', and he outlined a 'continuum running from the five guys hanging around some cars and, with an expertise both infantile and precocious, discussing the advantages of various car brands, to the obsession with methodology . . . today' (IS 75–6). These passages might explain why Adorno's critique of empirical methods has found little resonance in contemporary sociology. They permit the suspicion that this is unlikely to change. Significant exceptions, as DeNora (2003) illustrates in detail, may be found in the sociology of music.

One could speculate about the source of Adorno's misgivings. Wiggershaus (1994: 487) mentions the Institute's 1954 analysis of the corporate climate of steel tube producer Mannesmann. Adorno, he argues, expected the use of qualitative tools akin to those he had previously used, only to be disappointed by the study's quantitative disposition. Indeed, Adorno's report does not fundamentally question the potential of the 55 focus groups conducted, but suggests that the 1,176 coded interviews could be seen as limiting information to the scope of predetermined questions (VSII 642–3, 674). Adorno also saw the empirical-methodological advances in German sociology coincide with its disciplinary specialisation and theoretical and socio-critical atrophy (SSI 501–8). What is certain is that much of Adorno's subsequent sociological work no longer coheres with his earlier notion that research methods were fertile means for gathering sociological material. Most importantly perhaps, after the Group Experiment, Adorno never used authorised methods again.

On a chronological reading of the empirical dimension of Adorno's sociological *oeuvre*, his views on how to best obtain sociological material seem uneven. Until now, much of this unevenness could be seen as resulting from fluctuations over time. In the early to mid-1930s, under the strong influence of Kracauer and Benjamin, Adorno drew empirical material mainly from musical content analyses and fleeting personal observations of daily life. From the late 1930s to the mid-1950s, he endorsed and – with differing degrees of success – used empirical methods for acquiring data. Simultaneously, he never regarded method-guided research as the only way of fulfilling sociology's empirical requirements and engaged in several more or less elaborate qualitative content analyses. However, from the mid-1950s onwards, the unevenness in Adorno's view on how to acquire factual content was no longer a matter of temporal variation: the passages advocating and satirising methods cited here are both from his late work. Adorno's recommendations for empirical sociological research between 1955 and 1969 contain irregularities. Correspondingly, his refusal to conduct method-guided empirical research after the Group Experiment was only partly consistent, namely with those passages that articulated his growing uneasiness with authorised devices for obtaining sociological data.[18]

Empirical research in Adorno's late sociology

In 1969, Adorno still insisted that sociology was not a purely theoretical discipline, but 'require[d] so-called "field research"', i.e. 'empirical research': 'Benjamin ... said ... the might of what exists today rested more with facts than with convictions ... [H]e lent expression to the awareness of that nowadays omnipresent predominance of what is, to which the intellect is unable to stand up other than by saturating itself with what is, with facts' (SSI 539). The trouble, many commentators believe, is that by abandoning method-guided empirical research, Adorno left his sociological work void of factual content drawn from empirical observation. Tiedemann (GS9.2 413) describes *Group Experiment* as Adorno's last, namely 'only German language', investigation of 'empirical material'. '[W]ith the exception of [*Group Experiment*]', Drake (2004: 303–4) agrees, 'Adorno gradually distanced himself from the research process, preferring the task of the theoretician to ... fieldwork'. Gibson and Rubin (2002: 11) see 1957 as Adorno's final break with empirical research. Kalkowski (1988: 113) diagnoses a 'devaluation ... of

[18] Occasionally he emphasised that the Institute under his directorship continued pursuing such research (IS 140, 152 3).

empirical research and argumentation ... "Society" ... is ... contemplated from an external perspective ... The glance of the negativistic social theorist on the ghastly fatalism of the ever-same hinders a sociologically imaginative empirical flair.' Since the interpreters do not deny Adorno's unfaltering call for a sociology engaging with factual content, their reading implies a serious charge of inconsistency. The characterisation of Adorno's late sociology as inattentive to empirical material means no less than the accusation that a sizeable part of his postwar *oeuvre* habitually disregarded one of his own most adamant methodological demands on the discipline (see also Wiggershaus 1994: 496). The final sections of this chapter attempt to offer an alternative perspective on this part of Adorno's work.

Methodological reorientation

If Adorno consistently equated empirical research with the use of empirical methods, his abandonment of methods would be synonymous with ignoring his call for the collection of sociological material. But Adorno does not subscribe to that equation. Method-guided fieldwork is *one* way of obtaining data: 'empirical procedures do not merit simple priority. Not only are there others besides these: the mere existence of disciplines and modes of thinking does not justify them' (PD 71). In fact, Adorno sometimes interjects that more or less standardised methods such as surveys with a set of predefined questions potentially fetter observations of empirical phenomena. Adorno refuses to have his 'view of reality ... obstructed by the ... distorting optics of methodical measuring instruments' (Müller-Doohm 1996: 76). Since Adorno's emphasis on the importance of sociological material supplied by field research does not entail the dictate to use research methods, the accurate observation that he eventually ceased to employ methods does not prove that his late work violates his demand for factual data.

What is more problematic about Adorno's later work is that he hesitated to give sociologists plain advice on alternative approaches to empirical observation. The complaint that Adorno failed 'to define' his vision for field research 'with any exactness' (Wiggershaus 1994: 496) is understandable. Adorno never made 'dialectics something like a research-operation which can be taught and learned', to use Lazarsfeld's (1972: 176) phrase. This aspect of Adorno's sociology can certainly be explained. Adorno considers fixed prescriptions as a potential constraint on empirical research. The more rigidly defined the methods used for observation, the greater the danger that the observation allows material aspects of phenomena beyond the

methods' scope to escape. When Adorno criticises 'empirical methods ... origin[ating] in market research' for 'favour[ing]' subjective 'opinions, attitudes [and] modes of behaviour', he primarily criticises their inability to unearth the social relations conditioning them. But he also seems to worry that these methods establish too narrow a range of *empirical* material, notably where 'those commissioning research ... make sure ... that only reactions within the dominant "commercial system" are recorded' (PD 71). The more strictly prescribed the method, moreover, the stronger the tendency to apply it to various phenomena without transforming it, and the greater the likelihood that observations become insensitive to empirical details specific to different phenomena. Rather than burdening phenomena with a predefined 'method' *qua* 'schema of external order' (1976: 219), sociology, Adorno argues, should readjust its modes of observation and data collection each time in light of the particular phenomena under scrutiny. In reply to the reproach that he offers 'no binding rules of behaviour for sociological cognition', he writes: 'He who wishes to nestle up to the structure of his object and thinks of it as something in itself moving does not have at his disposal a mode of procedure independent of it' (PD 48). Yet shedding light on Adorno's reasoning does not turn his hints at alternatives to method-guided observation into a clearly defined research programme. His emphasis on out-of-the-way details notwithstanding, Adorno's resistance to giving further specific guidelines for fieldwork results in a rather broad range of what may in principle count as empirical observation and factual material in sociology. Already before World War II, Lazarsfeld complained to Adorno: 'You make a number of suggestions for empirical study and some of them are really very stimulating. But ... you would consider it empirical research if some one would say: "Let's make a study whether there are human beings living on the other planets"' (A&H2 441). Lazarsfeld could not foresee that in Adorno's late work, the question of extraterrestrial life would be far from sociologically trivial.[19]

Simultaneously, though, Adorno's critique of methods is intertwined with somewhat less elusive reconsiderations of the potential of personal encounters with social reality to help sociology meet the demand for empirical material. In the 'total, through and through socialised society, which ... permeat[es] everything singular', capitalist society's key characteristics can be discerned from the most ephemeral minutiae of daily life,

[19] See Chapter 6.

even from its most 'private' facets (SSI 186). This is not only a point about selecting phenomena for sociological investigation, but also about approaching them empirically: specifically personal encounters with details of one's own everyday life are increasingly valuable sources of material for examinations of exchange society.

For Adorno, as mentioned, personal observations have two advantages over the use of predetermined methods. Firstly, personal confrontations with empirical reality tend to avoid the application of a strictly defined set of devices to different phenomena and thus the corresponding methodical limitations on empirical content. In Adorno's view, Kracauer illustrates that it is possible to readjust observations in light of the phenomena under scrutiny and to register a material spectrum which includes empirical details specific to the phenomena. Warning again of 'the interest in method' allegedly 'prepondera[nt]' in sociology, Adorno tells his students that they will be 'more productive' as sociologists if they achieve 'a certain immediacy to the matter without all the ... empiricist experimental extravaganzas' in the name of 'so-called methodological purity' (PETG 171–2). It is no coincidence that his 1969 passage, cited above (p. 74), mentions *Benjamin's* conviction that social analysis must saturate itself with factual content. Adorno likely, albeit without providing any references, has in mind the opening line of Benjamin's (1996: 444) *One Way Street*, a work which, far from employing empirical methods, examines a wealth of empirical material – including the tiniest facets – which the author obtained through personal encounters with the world around him. Secondly, the individual's own often physically and mentally painful primary confrontations with empirical social life offer initial glimpses of the social whole that sociology is ultimately concerned with. Hence 'social situations in which one can observe immediately what society is', in which society is literally felt on one's skin, constitute fruitful empirical sources. Accordingly, Adorno instructs his students to 'feel or get under your skin in your living immediate experience that which one can ... call society' (IS 36–7).

Horkheimer, Adorno once half-jokingly told his students, had to teach his curiously calm dog how to bark properly (PETG 174). Similarly, Adorno believed that he needed to 'encourage' his sociology students to 'surrender ... to the matter in an unregimented fashion and to position themselves first of all vis-à-vis a primary intuition' (PETG 172). The participants of Adorno's 1960s sociology seminars on laughter and social conflict practiced his recommendations: 'Students were supposed to observe specific situations immediately. Their precise description and the interpretive attempts were supposed to illustrate that where several people are laughing together or clashing inimically, social moments are being expressed' (SSI 177). The students' 'unsystematic' and 'subjective'

observations were not guided by any empirical methods. They encountered occurrences of sneering laughter and shouting, practical jokes, verbal and physical violence, someone speaking to a drunk in public while knowingly grinning at bystanders, the ridicule of an old man trapped in a tram's automatic doors etc. Students also recorded numerous observations of situations of – particularly verbal – conflict: an old woman oblivious to traffic noise but reprimanding children at play, family quarrels over a broken television set, a shoe-saleswoman's resentment at her customer's remark that the proposed model did not fit, a tram conductor's aggressive complaints about lazy students or an argument at a traffic light (SSI 189–93). Thus the participants examined a series of empirical details which they subsequently interpreted in view of problems such as dependence, estrangement, social integration, the class antagonism and reified consciousness. For Adorno, the exercise was successful enough to mention the seminar report to following generations of students as a source for learning how to encounter social life in direct observation and feel it 'on one's . . . body' (IS 36).

None of this overrides Adorno's caveat that observations are untrustworthy (SSI 185). Sociological insight hinges on theoretically analysing empirical materials. What seems to become clearer here is that an informed evaluation of whether Adorno continued to conduct sociological research in line with his own call for factual content hinges not only on the question whether he continued to use methods, but also on the question whether he consulted personal observations of empirical social life for obtaining sociological material.

Personal observations

In retrospect, Adorno's 1930s sociological reflections on personal everyday encounters read like a minuscule prelude. Adorno's first postwar publication that employs personal observations for obtaining empirical material on social life in a sustained fashion was *Minima Moralia*. I emphasised that the book thematises fleeting quotidian details for examining exchange society. The primary perspective on these details is that of the 'narrowest private sphere . . . of the intellectual in emigration'. Adorno tackles social life as it befalls him personally (MM 18).[20]

[20] The book's subtitle is *Reflections from damaged life*. It indicates that Adorno's reflections *from* quotidian life are immersed in it; and that the book aims to divulge the wider social conditions of damaged life, rather than solely *a* (his) damaged existence. Adorno dedi cates *Minima Moralia's* first fragment to Proust (MM 21), who allegedly endeavoured to write everyone's 'autobiography' through observations from his own life (OL 426).

A persistent theme of *Minima Moralia* is the damage interpersonal relations have incurred in the world of exchange, where 'everything is business' (MM 41). Given his recommendation to develop modes of observation as best possible in consideration of the phenomena under inspection, it is unsurprising that personal observations of daily surroundings played an outstanding role in Adorno's research for the book. His own confrontations with everyday life brought forth material on love, sex and marriage (MM 30–1, 171–2), intergenerational relations (MM 22–3), relations among intellectuals and academics (MM 28–30, 128–32) and many other subjects.

One fragment argues that through adapting to the 'profit economy' human interaction becomes a compulsively efficient give-and-take between indifferent actors, a 'straight line ... as if they were points'. Adorno's argument is informed by his observations of people greeting him with quick, general 'hallos' without 'raising their hats', and of colleagues contacting him via unsigned 'inter-office communication' rather than in personal letters (MM 41). Another piece (MM 116–8) describes Adorno's encounters with American gastronomy: waiters ignorant about the content of the menu and indifferent towards the guest's well-being; the pressure to leave after getting the bill without having asked for it, while other guests are already waiting for the table; the sterile hotel rooms and their room service, managed in strict separation from the restaurant; or the porter's refusal to answer questions beyond his immediate realm of responsibility. To Adorno, gastronomy reveals the imperative to assist institutions in making a profit, the habitual treatment of humans as things, and the subjection of their relationships to exchange and the industrial division of labour.

Fragment 19 reports on the common habit to slam doors, like car or refrigerator doors, instead of 'clos[ing them] ... quietly and discreetly, yet firmly', or to simply let doors 'snap shut', instead of 'looking behind' oneself and 'shielding the interior' by which one is 'receive[d]'. 'What does it mean for the subject', Adorno asks, 'that there are no more casement windows to open, but only sliding frames to shove, no gentle latches but turnable handles, no forecourt, no doorstep before the street, no wall around the garden'? The gestures of the subjects he observed have become 'brutal' because they have had to adapt to a technical environment governed by cold 'functionality' (MM 40). The empirical dimension of this fragment resonates with a key concern of present-day ethnography. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007: 121, 133–6) warn that sociologists regularly neglect the material artefacts that populate social settings. They hold that ethnographers of everyday life ought to investigate how social actors engage with material objects, how this material environment

constraints social activity, and what kinds of interests and values artefacts embody.

Minima Moralia contains many similar fragments, and the ideas they contain could be discussed at greater length. One further piece is particularly worth mentioning. It reports an encounter from Adorno's schooldays:

> The five patriots, who set upon a single schoolfellow [Kameraden], thrashed him and, when he complained to the teacher, defamed him a traitor to the class are they not the same as those who tortured prisoners to refute claims by foreigners that prisoners were tortured?[21] They whose hallooing knew no end when the top boy blundered did they not stand grinning and sheepish around the Jewish detainee, poking fun at his maladroit attempt to hang himself? They who could not put together a correct sentence but found all of mine too long did they not abolish German literature and replace it by their 'writ' . . .? Some covered their chests with mysterious insignia . . . [and] proclaimed themselves Sturmbann and Standartenführern.[22] (MM 192 3)

The passage strikingly illustrates Adorno's conviction that painful encounters with social life are especially conducive to providing material for sociological reflection. Not only does Adorno believe that his 'own school experience' should have enabled him to 'anticipat[e]' the conclusion of later method-guided studies that 'non-refractory children ha[ve] no prejudices' while 'raucous ones . . . ven[t] their prejudices on others' (PETG 193). The incident, he claims, should have also allowed him to 'deduce' capitalism's fascist radicalisation. To the child, the political phenomenon of fascism was certainly not obvious. Yet when he was battered, Adorno asserts, he 'felt . . . the force' of the impending evil strongly enough to recognise it upon its arrival. As the schoolboy was 'brushed' by the catastrophe's 'motifs', which were 'burned into him' (MM 192), he perceived society in a rudimentary fashion where it hurt. He literally got society under his skin, as the professor later phrases it in his sociology lectures.

Referring to Freud's (1955: 12–13, 24–33) *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Benjamin (2006: 313–21) discusses transformations in experience in modernity. Stimuli, which cannot leave memory traces in consciousness,

[21] The translator underlines the piece's fascist theme, mentioning that its title, 'The Bad Comrade', alludes to Uhland's 1809 song 'The Good Comrade', 'popularized by the Nazis'. But this song has been sung by many a group not only in Germany throughout the centuries (Oesterle 1997). *Klasse* seems at least *also* to evoke 'proletariat', *Kamerad* at least *also* its Bolshevik meaning. Like *Klassenverräter* (class traitor), *Kamerad* also expresses even if reticently, and even if this fragment explicitly addresses fascism Adorno's (CM 94) non negligible doubts about the divide between fascism and party communism before World War II.

[22] Ranks in the SS.

can leave profound memory traces if they are not consciously experienced. Consciousness acts as a screen against stimuli, preventing traumatic shocks, which are seen as due to breaks in the stimulus barrier. Frights depend on the absence of shock defence and fear, which operate in preparation for stimuli. Adorno was uneasy about some of the implications of Benjamin's appropriation of Freud (A&B 320), although these Freudian terms also play a role in some of Adorno's writings (1973c: 155–7; 1991a: 69). However, Adorno's fragment allows one to suspect that the schoolchild's stimulus barrier was broken and that he was unprepared for the beating. Adorno, the grown-up in 1935 in a moment of reflection upon a lingering memory, writes of a fascist 'dream', or rather 'nightmare', which his classmates staged years before its realisation, and speaks of the 'violence of the fright-image [Schreckbild]' they enacted before him (MM 192–3).

Minima Moralia does not draw conclusions on exchange society directly from immediate, however violent, perceptions of social life. Adorno's warning of the limitations of observations applies throughout his work: each encounter is immediately subject to far-reaching theoretical interpretations, for which the observations provide only the raw material. Yet what is at issue here is precisely the provision of material. *Minima Moralia* illustrates Adorno's engagement with personal, private, at times thoroughly painful confrontations with the world around him. The project seems to have shown him a fruitful way of obtaining factual content for his reflections on capitalist society.

Minima Moralia was written in the 1940s and published in 1951. The clues it can offer about Adorno's sociological examinations of capitalism after he abandoned methods in the mid-1950s appear limited. Yet on closer scrutiny, it emerges that from the 1950s onwards, personal accounts of daily life became a frequent feature of his texts.[23] *Minima Moralia* seems to have been a vital inspiration for his continuing efforts to reflect on factual content drawn from private encounters.[24] The book's ongoing influence on the empirical dimension of Adorno's work shows in his travelogue fragments, which engage with deeply intimate travel observations for the purpose of fuelling his 'microsociology' of exchange society with material. Due to their thematic specificity, I will discuss

[23] Biographical research has deciphered Part III of *Minima Moralia* as containing its most uncompromising references to Adorno's private life (Aguigah 2003: 21). To his publish ers Adorno wrote that this was the book's dearest part to him (Adorno *et al.* 2003: 18).

[24] Paddison's (1993: 28 9) link between *Minima Moralia* and Adorno's aesthetics is sig nificant: 'The starting point for each section is always a concrete, individual, and usually private experience . . . taken as the material for dialectical reflection.' *Minima Moralia* 'in a sense provides the model for much of Adorno's later writing on music and aesthetics'.

these writings in Chapter 6. Equally lucid illustrations for Adorno's focus on personal observations in his late sociology can be found in several lectures and essays of that time, many of which were collected in *Critical Models*.

Adorno's essays have a place not only for the ephemeral, but also for fleeting personal observations. The conflict study he conducted *with* his students provides a principal sociological example of this. Adorno's analysis of reified consciousness, as mentioned, is informed by his own direct observations *of* his students. In addition to the materials discussed in Chapter 1, Adorno reflects upon encounters with candidates who were 'ostentatiously moaning' during exams and pronounced foreign words in their home dialect (CM 26–7, 29–31). He attributes these articulations to a resistance to intellectual work grounded in an educational deficit which undermines the individual's capacity to question seemingly natural conventions of thought. Similarly, Adorno's 1965 essay 'On the Question: "What Is German?"' explores 'some things I observed on myself' – rather than citing data from the method-guided *Group Experiment* he might have been expected to turn to. Adorno's observation that in Germany he can publish texts in his chosen format, whereas in America they were supposed to be edited according to standards of publication, sparks reflections on intellectual integration and the resistance of consciousness to 'rationalized commercial exploitation' (CM 211). Adorno's closely corresponding 'Free Time' also uses

> a trivial [geringfügige] personal experience to elucidate the problem. Time and again, in interviews and surveys one is asked what kind of hobby one has.[25] When the illustrated newspapers report about one of those matadors of the culture industry ... one of the chief activities of the culture industry then they seldom miss the opportunity to relate something more or less homely about the hobbies of those concerned. I am startled by the question whenever I meet with it. (CM 168)

This and several other fleeting private observations subsequently inspire wide-ranging meditations on the core principles governing capitalist society.[26]

Although Adorno's writings on anti-Semitism and Germany's relationship with its Nazi past still refer to material from earlier method-informed studies, unlike his earlier research they now also draw more strongly on his own, private observations (see also Hohendahl 1995: 55–6).[27] Adorno even underlines his conviction that in principle everyone can have primary

[25] After the war, Adorno became a well known public figure in Germany, who was often addressed in celebrity polls of newspapers and magazines (VSII 734 9).
[26] I will consider both texts in detail in Chapter 3. [27] See Chapter 4.

encounters with manifestations of the trans-subjective opinion patterns which *Group Experiment* sought to unearth. We can close our eyes and ears to them, but '[w]e all . . . know the readiness . . . to deny or minimize what happened' (CM 90). Adorno describes a particularly intense observation in this context:

> Once I walked past a group of chauffeurs, who were then working in the pool for the American occupying forces. They were nastily ranting to each other about the Jews. I went to the nearest officer and had them arrested. In the station, I had a long and thorough conversation mainly with the ringleader, and I heard a sentence from him which imprinted itself upon me very much: 'Well, you know, yesterday we were Nazi, today we're Ami, and tomorrow we're Commie.' Involuntarily, he thereby disclosed to me a deep wisdom about the entire character structure of his type. The motive of adaptation at any cost outweighed everything else in him. (VSI 379 80)

This personal confrontation with a careless utterance – distinguished by a degree of spontaneity that *The Authoritarian Personality* and *Group Experiment* aimed to achieve through complicated methodical arrangements – provides instructive material for illustrating the problem of intellectual integration, which Adorno saw as feeding the dangerous prejudice and opinion patterns that had survived in postwar Germany.

Adorno's 1960s sociology lectures occasionally associate the decipherment of the social dimension of artworks with qualitative content analysis (IS 87–8). On the basis of this association, his four volumes of *Notes to Literature* could be read as content analyses which helped sustain the empirical dimension of his sociological inquiries into exchange society. Negt (1995: 7–8) mentions the sociological relevance of lyric poetry for Adorno. Similarly, my sixth chapter will touch upon the sociological dimension of Adorno's interpretation of Beckett.[28] Yet Adorno's work on literature is first and foremost situated in his aesthetic *oeuvre*, and it must not be forgotten that he never thought it possible simply to erase, or leap across, extant disciplinary boundaries. It is a matter for discussion whether his writings on literature can provide decisive evidence for judging the empirical layer of his late work's more narrowly conceived sociological endeavours.

Adorno's sociological writings of the late 1950s and 1960s insist that sociology cannot do without empirical material. However, rather than

[28] See also the contributions to König's (1996) volume, which address Adorno's efforts to interpret the social whole on the basis of exemplary reconstructions of single cases in relation to his reading of *Endgame*. A further example of Adorno's endeavours to decipher the social content of literature is his Huxley essay from *Prisms* (P 95 117), which I repeatedly cited in Chapter 1.

simultaneously insisting on the use of empirical methods, Adorno became increasingly convinced that personal observations of empirical social life also constituted fruitful sources of factual content. Adorno's verdicts on empirical methods were certainly irregular. Some passages are acutely critical; others, including studies employing personal observations, mention that these observations could or should be followed up by method-guided research as well as by detailed document analyses and psychoanalytical case studies (CM 86–8, 174–7).[29] While this never happened, Adorno did persistently draw upon personal observations of social life for sociological material. This makes it difficult to dismiss his late sociology as empirically empty and suggests that until his death he was conducting sociological examinations of exchange society in accordance with his belief that such examinations required empirical content.

Adorno once noted that Veblen, who pursued a similarly unmethodical 'method', was, partly for this reason, 'defamed as destructive, as crazy, . . . as an outsider' (P 76). At a time when it was becoming increasingly 'commonplace in sociology' to engage in 'an overelaborate discourse, or, more often, monologue upon methods' (Frisby 1981: 69), Adorno's renewed focus on personal encounters may have appeared equally incongruous. Indeed, it is debatable whether Adorno's approach to empirical research in the late 1950s and 1960s, which was more affinitive with his 1930s experiments under the influence of Simmel, Kracauer and Benjamin than with Lazarsfeld's research, was more fruitful empirically than his own studies of the 1940s and 1950s. On the one hand, Adorno's earlier method-guided work and his content analyses of the Thomas broadcasts or astrology cover wider empirical areas than his later essays. On the other hand, sociologists have highlighted the capacity of Adorno's personal observations to bring to the fore otherwise easily neglected empirical details. Kracauer lauded the 'striking observations' (A&K 625) and the 'construction in the material' (A&K 633) in Adorno's essay on his philosophy students. More recently, Neckel (2005: 189–91) stated that although Adorno provides no 'systematic methodology', not even material for '[m]ethodical handbooks', his 'microsociology' contains a 'collection of observations of social scenes and phenomena' which are 'brillian[t]' enough to render contemporary sociologists 'pusillanimous'. One way of evaluating the empirical layers of Adorno's late sociology

[29] For instance, the educational impact of television could be tested by experiments compar ing what children learn from televised and conventional lessons (Adorno 1971: 65). Bonß (1983: 211) argues that Adorno's 'inductive, . . . single case oriented procedure', which, resisting 'abstract methodological rules', has 'developed . . . experimentally', need not exclude existing methods, but also 'requires . . . new procedures'.

would be a thorough examination of the sociological shortcomings and merits of his empirical research of that time in view of contemporary trends in the discipline. It would be worthwhile to conduct critical reflections on Adorno's experiments with personal observations in light of current developments in ethnographic research – akin, perhaps, to the conversation I tried to instigate earlier between his qualitative content analyses and present-day tendencies in document research. The final part of this chapter has sought to prepare such a dialogue by taking a fresh look at the empirical dimension of Adorno's late sociology. Since for Adorno empirical data, no matter how they are obtained, are always untrustworthy and subject to theoretical scrutiny, the next chapter must return to the theoretical dimension of his sociology.

3 Sociological reflection

In view of the untrustworthiness of observation and its factual data, Adorno makes an insistent case for their theoretical analysis. Theoretical analysis, like empirical research, is therefore a key theme in his reflections on sociology. It is also a major issue in contemporary social science debates. What distinguishes Adorno's writings on theoretical interpretation in sociological inquiry is that they question sociology's ability to offer conclusions on social life. Theoretical analysis constitutes another site for Adorno's negotiations of disciplinary boundaries. His sociologico-methodological ideas for theoretical interpretation draw heavily on epistemological considerations, while these epistemological arguments are usually forced to address sociological questions. This makes some criss-crossing between discrete areas unavoidable, especially in the first half of this chapter.

Theoretical analysis in sociology

Adorno's ideas for theoretical social analysis can be elucidated in three steps. First, the limitations of factual material must be clarified. The previous chapter repeatedly stated, without explaining, Adorno's caveat that empirical observations cannot adequately represent reality. Thus the role of theory and its mode of procedure in response to those limitations come into view, along with the problems and potentials Adorno's sociology develops in its theoretical dimension.

The social limitations of sociological material

Adorno's sociologico-methodological work strongly criticises 'positivist' social science. For Adorno, who admits to a precariously sweeping definition, positivism means observing, comparing and classifying phenomena; accepting factual materials, the positively given, as the basis for examining reality; and rejecting theoretical speculation (CM 8–9, SSI 246–7, VSI 17, 33). Positivism suffers from the 'naiveté that confuses

facts and figures . . . with [the world's] foundation' (HTS 74). Adorno took issue with positivist social science's philosophical underpinnings as early as 1931, combining his endorsement of logical positivism's emphasis on observation with misgivings about its uncritical acceptance of facts for the truth and its dismissal of all empirically unverifiable thoughts (1977: 125–6). In the mid-1930s, Adorno sought to attack 'positivist' sociology directly, although his target, Mannheim's sociology, arguably defies this label. Indeed, whereas Adorno's 1937 Mannheim essay describes 'Mannheim's attitude' as 'epistemologically positivistic' (VSI 33), 'Mannheim flirts with positivism' according to the same passage in its 1953 version (P 42). The 'positivist dispute' in German sociology between critical theorists Adorno and Habermas and critical rationalists Popper and Albert mainly took place in the final decade of Adorno's life.[1] One of Adorno's central arguments in these debates is that observation is not sufficient for grasping reality; that factual data constitute untrustworthy representations of the world. Focusing on the problems sociology encounters by virtue of being embedded in the same context it seeks to examine, Adorno conceptualises the limitations of empirical observations and materials as socially conditioned:

> The inability to experience can by no means only be grasped as a result of individual developments, let alone developments determined by the laws of the species. The blinding of cognising consciousness against the subliminal arises itself from the objective structure of a society whose totality, jointed without gaps, obstructs the view onto that which continues to exist underneath the sem blance of a reconciled condition. (SSI 194)

Adorno distinguishes between reality as it is subjectively perceived and objective reality itself. However unassuming the subject's observation of external reality, perception, he argues, receives impulses from, as well as always projecting subjective notions onto, reality. The perceiving subject reconstructs reality – 'recreates the world outside' – '[f]rom the traces [the world] leaves behind in its senses' (DE 155). Perception certainly receives impulses from the physical components of the individual's encounter with reality, from sensations and impressions. But in perception such impulses are always instantly worked into the subject's intellectual reconstruction of reality. Empirical material is never reality as it is but its subjective reconstruction. The devices subjects employ for recreating the world are concepts. Epistemology's putatively most concrete being, 'components of

[1] Popper (PD 290 1, 298 300) rightly underlined that this dispute involved no positivists. Frisby (PD xxix) saw Adorno as criticising 'a naive positivism . . . hardly at issue amongst . . . the disputants' but, years after Adorno's death, added: 'even though it may remain in operation in much social scientific practice'.

impressions or "sensations"', are actually inseparable from 'categorial moments' (AE 148, see also HTS 57–8). 'Perception ... can be interpreted ... only as a thinking performance, ... as "apprehension in intuition",[2] as categorisation' (AE 154). The dependence of perception on reconstruction entails that reality is not encountered immediately (*unmittelbar*) but always conceptually mediated (*vermittlet*) (see also DE 159–60, ND 156). No language, no fact (JA 42).

Insofar as every sensing, thinking subject is a living human being, consciousness, Adorno argues, is an element of, and inseparable from, the spatio-temporal world (AE 156, 226–7, HTS 16–17, ND 184–5). Simultaneously, since all human subjects are socialised, consciousness is socially determined (see CM 11, ND 178–80). Crucially here, the process of reconstructing reality from sense traces inherent in all subjective perception operates under society's regulation. What are social, Adorno specifies, are the forms, schemata or concepts at the subject's disposal for reconstructing reality in observation: 'in all categories of thought the objectivity of the social process is prior to the contingency of the individual subject' (HTS 78, see also DE xvi, 65; 1999: 68). In concepts, Adorno contends, history has sedimented (MM 127). History is here understood as collective activities by which humans have been intervening in nature. Created for and in these interventions (ND 23; see also Cook 2007: 164–5), concepts are social phenomena. Since subjects conceptually reconstruct reality in line with the prevalent social conditions, observations and the factual data they procure are always subjectively as well as socially regulated (CM 221, NLII 63).[3] Cognition is socially determined 'down to every individual sense datum' (HTS 63). Since social integration seizes the devices available to observation for grasping reality, empirical material does not merely represent reality, but has a characteristic social dimension.

Sociological observations and facts are no exception. Adorno criticises Mannheim's method as inductive. Mannheim, he alleges, relies on empirical facts, supposedly established by unbiased observation, for forming general categorical frameworks (P 37, VSI 16–18). Mannheim tends to deny that no factual reconstruction of social reality is purely representative of what it designates, but also shaped by the 'pre-ordered structure ... on which the scientific subject ..., along with its "experience", depends' (VSI

[2] Kant's 'synthesis of apprehension' unites 'manifoldness' in 'intuition' (1999: 229). Critical of elementary dissections of consciousness (AE 157), Adorno nevertheless agrees that cognising objects involves synthesis; that receptivity is combined with spontaneity.

[3] '[S]ociety' being 'immanent to experience' (CM 250), Adorno's 'transition' (MCP 45) from sociology to philosophy and vice versa is unsurprising.

33, see also P 43). More than thirty years later, Adorno reiterates that sociological observations bear a conceptual moment and that the concepts at the sociologist's disposal for reconstructing social life are socially preformed. Although empirical 'methods', for instance, 'are objective to the extent that they do not vary according to the individual psyche of the researcher who employs them, ... methods are themselves "functions" derived from the interaction of human subjects' (Drake 2004: 308). Society shapes even the simplest sociological encounters and the materials they procure (PD 27).

By saying that 'nothing under the sun' is now 'left outside' society, Adorno means that society shapes every facet of the world, including 'nature' (IS 65). For '[e]ven nature, seemingly untouched by [social labour,] ... is ... mediated' by humanity's self-preserving activities (HTS 68). Society thus affects factual reconstructions of the world also in that all objective reality, every detail possibly encountered, is subject to social domination. In sociological terms, the social whole mediates all social phenomena: human, intellectual, interpersonal and institutional realities. Where Mannheim seeks to classify a network of co-existing social forces irreducible to an economic basis, whose laws together determine a historically specific epoch (e.g. 1940: 173–90), he threatens to neglect that the underlying 'unity of the capitalist system' governs each facet of social life in turn (VSI 17). '[T]he phenomena' of sociology 'are all situated in a medium that shapes them decisively' (SoI 188): the 'universal social structure' (GS9.2 357). '[T]he behaviour of ... elements' registered by social research, e.g. opinions or attitudes, is 'to an eminent degree predetermined by the context of the whole' (PETG 29). What is usually termed 'background study', the discernment of the cultural, economic, social preconditions of people's answers in interview or questionnaire material, constitutes one step towards the indispensable examination of capitalist society in its regulation of diverse aspects of social life.[4] Society impacts on empirical sociological material or data also by affecting every phenomenon sociologists might observe.

Since empirical facts originate in the subject's socialised encounter with a socialised reality, society 'makes [facts] what they are' (ND 169, see also 307). As *Group Experiment* accentuates: 'In all facts, even in the ostensibly purely sensuous impression, there hides an element of the forming intellect, ... even our interest, which directs our attention to this tree or this house ... Something more encompassing enters both[,] ... the entire society, the entire history of humans judging objects, which is

[4] PD 73 5, 83 4, SSI 536 7, 543 5, VSII 674 84.

simultaneously embodied by the objects themselves' (GEX 9). Due to society's regulation of the primary sociological observations that produce empirical data as well as of every single social detail observed, sociological material does not simply represent reality but is also characterised by a twofold social dimension: 'the facts ... are conditioned' (PD 84–5); 'the factual particular has meaning to the extent that ... the system of society ... appears in it' (JA 41).

The untrustworthiness of sociological observation appears to stem from the dilemma that observable phenomena are determined by a social whole which cannot be observed as an 'immediate fact' (IS 108). Focusing on 'isolated', 'narrow sectors', empirical research is 'in principle' unable to address 'the central questions of the social structure' – the 'totality' – 'on which the life of humans depends' (GS9.2 358). Society enters but *hides* in 'dispersed facts'; hence they are 'always more than what they immediately seem' (JA 41).

Although these formulations sketch the problem of observation highlighted by Adorno, they do not exhaust his argument. The twofold social dimension of empirical material raises two demands. Society's reign over *subjective* reconstructions of reality means that the perceiving subject can understand reality only if it appreciates to what extent its observations and their factual materials are merely socially guided reconstructions and to what extent, by contrast, they actually represent traces of reality. Understanding the social conditions of cognition is indispensable to a faithful understanding of reality. This requirement reverberates in Adorno's statement that '[o]nly insight into science's inherent social mediations contributes to [its] objectivity' (PD 19). If factual material fails to disclose the social conditions of the observation that established it, it remains untrustworthy. Society's reign over single *objects* entails that a faithful engagement with reality must examine society as it determines objects. Grasping social phenomena correctly depends on recognising their mediation by the social whole. 'There is', Adorno states, 'something like a historical coercion in the movement of things. Subjects on their part are also conditioned by this historical coercion.' Cognition must 'account for this conditionality' (Adorno and von Haselberg 1965: 487–8). The twofold social dimension of empirical data, which they acquired by dint of society's regulation of observation and of all observable reality, must be revealed. Likewise, sociological investigations hinge on the disclosure of the sociological material's social dimension. Sociological facts must be understood 'as expression[s] of the social totality' (SSI 514, see also 195, 543–6, 581–2; PD 11, 76).

In contemporary capitalism, empirical intuition is particularly constrained in meeting these demands. Social integration occasions the

reification and solidification of society, culminating in social estrangement. Humans experience social reality as opaque, invariant nature. This obfuscation makes it especially difficult to grasp society immediately in its regulation of subjective observation. 'Humans cannot recognise ... society ... within themselves, because they are estranged from each other and the whole' (SP1 69, see also CM 254–5). In galvanised, opaque society, direct observations do not disclose the social conditions which regulate them. Hence it is not immediately discernible to what extent factual material represents reality as opposed to being guided by the social regulation of its subjective reconstructions. These circumstances also prevent perception from grasping society's domination of objects. Direct intuition, Adorno warns, fails to discern 'what migrated into the object as its law of movement'. The object's social content remains hidden behind the factual façade, 'concealed by the ideological form of the phenomenon' (ND 206). For sociologists, this means that the social whole, particularly in its current opacity, is imperceptible or unobservable in its characterising single social phenomena (IS 34): 'the facts ascertained do not faithfully reflect the underlying social conditions but rather they simultaneously constitute the veil by means of which these conditions, of necessity, disguise themselves' (PD 85). Empirically established individual 'opinion[s], attitude[s], mode[s] of behaviour', for instance, are at best skewed expressions of the 'essential laws of society' governing them, and usually do not reveal these 'conditions' at all (GS9.2 358–9).[5] Factual material discloses neither the social conditions regulating subjective reconstruction in observation, nor the social components of individual phenomena. The twofold social dimension of empirical material, including that of specifically sociological data, is not immediately accessible.

Hence, 'that which is immediate to experience' is not the 'real cause' (HF 25). Facts 'build a solid wall in front of what is actually taking place' (CoM 110). Due to social integration, sociological facts have a twofold social dimension which – notably in galvanised society – is not immediately transparent. The 'subject's loss of experience in the world of the ever-same', and the untrustworthiness of its observations, 'designates the anthropological side of the ... estrangement process'; 'social estrangement consists ... in removing the objects of cognition from the sphere of immediate experience' (P 90). That 'society cannot be nailed down as a fact', Adorno argues (against positivist social science), 'testifies to ... mediation': 'the facts' are not 'final' (PD 11).

[5] For example, the empirical fact that workers no longer believe that they are workers offers only a distorted articulation of the social conditions in which they live.

The role of theory

Adorno's 1931 critique of logical positivism already warned that empirical data required theoretical decipherment because they were not as 'final, . . . dee[p]' and 'indestructible' as some philosophers of science claimed (1977: 126). His later writings repeatedly emphasise that untrustworthy immediate encounters demand persistent reflection and interpretation: 'only speculation which . . . show[s] what really . . . lies behind the . . . facticity can . . . do justice to reality' (HF 30). In response to the limitations of empirical observation, theoretical analysis is given the task of disclosing the factual material's hidden social dimension.[6] Yet no sooner does theory thus unsettle the facts' claim to truth than it begins to reveal its own severe predicaments.

Decipherment Adorno's sociologico-methodological work is shaped by his epistemological considerations, but it seldom reiterates these considerations in detail. It is helpful to outline some of the epistemological ideas before clarifying their significance for social research. According to Adorno, theoretical analysis involves self-reflection: theory examines cognition to distinguish the subject's reconstruction of reality from traces of reality itself. Yet this reflexive operation is only an initial critical step. If, to argue with the later Durkheim, notably with his interventions in the theory of knowledge in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1995: 8–18),[7] cognition's 'constitutive formants' have 'originated socially' (CM 257); if even individual sense data are socially governed, then any 'critique of experience' must 'attai[n] the latter's . . . historical, . . . social . . . conditionedness' (CM 250, see also DE 214, ND 198). Subjective observations being socially regulated, reflection must involve an analysis of the cognitive faculty in view of its social conditions. As much as factual material must be traced back to the subject's contributions, theory must also always trace the subjective observations which established the material back to their determinant social reality. Such an analysis conducts 'enlightenment . . . [a]s demythologisation', which is 'no longer only . . . reductio ad hominem, but also inversely . . . reductio hominis' (ND 187). The analysis aims to ascertain

[6] In 1931, Adorno noted: 'One would seriously have to ask whether realist novels are still realistic at all: whether the faithful depiction of what appears does not also inadvertently adopt all that is semblance in that which appears and forgets what it veils; whereas only a break through the closed context of appearance . . . could . . . unveil the actual . . . reality . . . [T]his procedure justifies itself only by assimilating itself to social theory' (VSII 541). Decades later, Adorno would accuse theory free positivist social science as unrealistic realism (S 145).

[7] See also Adorno and Horkheimer's (DE 16) reference to Durkheim and Mauss 1963.

to what extent factual material is merely grounded in the social conditions steering subjective reconstructions of reality, rather than representing reality itself. Simultaneously, theoretical analysis must decipher the social content hiding inside the object. Knowledge of the object depends on knowing how the social totality affects it. By combining both operations, theoretical interpretation unearths from the material its social dimensions. 'Critique means nothing but the confrontation of a judgement' – and '[p]erception' *is* a 'rudimentary judgement' (AE 157) – 'with the mediations inherent to it' (AE 153). Theoretical analysis highlights those of the material's elements that are rooted in the social regulation of subjective observation, instead of representing objective reality, and those that originated in society's determination of the object.

Adorno's Mannheim critique addresses his demand for the 'correction of . . . "facts" in the process of theoretical cognition of society' directly to sociology. '[D]escriptive facts relate' to society 'like semblance to reality'. Sociology requires a conceptual-theoretical framework which can unlock the material in its social being (VSI 34). In the 1930s, Adorno was becoming increasingly aware of the resourcefulness of Horkheimer's work for his own sociological thinking. Adorno and Horkheimer agreed that positivism's fundamental flaws were its orientation on crude facts, its neglect of their social relativity and its unwillingness to analyse them theoretically and with a view to social change (A&H1 242–5). Adorno's central inspiration (A&H1 322) was Horkheimer's *The Latest Attack on Metaphysics*.[8] The early empiricists, Locke and Hume, argues Horkheimer, still raised the question of the knowing subject's involvement in science. Recent currents like the Vienna Circle, where 'verification through perception is the Alpha and Omega' (Horkheimer 1995: 142–3), are unconcerned about it: they disregard the distinction between facts constructed in subjective observation and reality (1995: 151–2, 155–7).[9] Horkheimer defends the theoretical penetration of factual material, but adds that such analyses cannot be accomplished by examining the perceiving subject. The subject's empirical reconstruction of reality is directed by concepts, language and ultimately social life (1995: 144–5, 151, 157–60). Hence it must be established to what extent empirical material is characterised by the social conditions of perception. Reflections upon factual data, Horkheimer concludes, require a theory of society to access their 'historical situation' (1995: 159). Accepting facts

[8] Horkheimer's (1995: 188 243) *Traditional and Critical Theory* states the following ideas more lucidly. Adorno read *Latest Attack* as Horkheimer's 'first . . ., very authentic' for mulation of 'our position' on sociological positivism (A&H4 820 1).

[9] Many years later, Adorno repeats this comparison (without citing Horkheimer) (PD 54).

as truth manifests the 'inability to grasp what exists as the result of the social life process in which the individual participates, ... the estrangement of the product of social labour' (1995: 156).

A quarter-century later, Adorno reiterated his call for theoretical analysis in sociology in response to a talk by Popper at the 1961 Tübingen conference that sparked the 'positivist dispute'. Adorno's reply does not reject Popper's (PD 87–90) notion that scientific knowledge is unstable because cognition proceeds as continuous critique of solutions to problems, rather than accumulating observations. But the devil is in the detail. Adorno questions his interlocutor's view that solutions must be 'accessible to factual [sachlichen] criticism'. This sounds 'at least ambiguous' to Adorno. Popper implies that theory functions as a set of hypotheses which must be wholly criticisable with reference to facts, thus granting empirical material the status of a falsifier which Adorno thinks it does not deserve: 'facts ... are not the last thing to which knowledge might attach itself'.[10] Adorno would certainly like to see problematic theoretical statements negated. His method for doing so is immanent critique, the exposure of flaws within a theoretical framework (PD 112–13). He seldom concedes that sociological material can falsify theorems. Adorno adds that mutual critique within the scientific community, which Popper (PD 95–6) deems a basis for objectivity, cannot exempt putative sociological knowledge from theoretical critique either. '[S]cientific thought control', itself socially conditioned, motivates Adorno's suspicion that the 'critical impulse is at one with the resistance to the rigid conformity of each dominant opinion' (PD 112, see also 29–30).

The judgement that Adorno had no 'regard for' Popper's 'views' (Goldstein 2004: 270), or that the two thinkers 'courteously talked past one another ... present[ing] shorthand recapitulations of their positions on the philosophy of science' (Wiggershaus 1994: 568; see also Müller-Doohm 1996: 155), threatens to belittle the subtle intersections between the talks. Frisby (2004; see also PD xxvii–xxx) offers a more nuanced reading, explaining why the dispute was so difficult for the disputants to have and elucidating differences in philosophical grounding as well as further points of direct contention between Adorno and Popper. This is not to deny that Adorno's vision of sociology's theoretical task from this period is informed by his epistemological convictions. Sociology, Adorno

[10] The ambiguity hinges on Popper's term *sachlich* (Adorno, Albert *et al.* 1989: 105 6), which resonates with 'empirical', 'factual' and 'objective'. Adorno hears mainly empirical undertones. Indeed, Popper states that problems arise from the 'discovery' of 'contra diction[s] ... between supposed knowledge and ... facts' (PD 88) and that the 'main function' of 'observations ... is to check and refute ... our theories' (PD 299 300).

maintains, cannot rest with empirical material but 'requires . . . reflection' (1972: 127): 'so-called empiry free from theory is . . . merely ideology, result[ing] . . . in things of the façade' (PETG 62). The 'wall' of facts before reality 'can be torn down only by speculative thinking' (CoM 110). The socialisation of subjective observations and all single social phenomena ensures that sociological material is 'structured through the . . . social totality' (PD 106). The totality can only be deciphered theoretically (S 146). Theory is summoned to interpret factual material with regards to the material's social dimension and the underlying conditions of capitalism (IS 21–2, SSI 195, 581–2). Thus sociology 'attempt[s] to emphasise the mediation of the facts . . . by the whole of society' (SoI 184). Adorno invokes the concept of 'social physiognomy' once more. It involves 'interpretation', 'becom[ing] aware of the totality in the features of social givenness' (PD 32). In advancing socialisation, interpretation is ever more urgent: 'the more the particular is defined as a mere object belonging to the universal . . . the more the so-called facts become a mere cloak veiling what really exists' (HF 30).

Liquefaction, reciprocity, perpetual negation The 'life' of 'thought', Adorno argues, 'strikes [einschlägt]' empirical materials like lightening (MM 126). By accentuating the material's social dimension, theory illuminates what the material hides. Thus theory spotlights the material's inability to reveal of its own accord to what extent it is socially suffused. Thought dispels the myth that observation and its material faithfully represent the world and unsettles their claim to truth. Theoretical sociological analysis shows that sociological material cannot disclose social reality and 'relativize[s] critically the cognitive value of appearance' (PD 84). Thought 'liquef[ies], through the self-reflection of science, what has become congealed through science' (HTS 73).

Here Adorno's sociology reveals one of its most problematic consequences. In its attempt to discern the material's social dimension, theoretical analysis encounters a familiar predicament. Social integration entangles ever more aspects of human and material life in the exchange relations that make up contemporary society. Although Adorno insists that the resulting 'complexity of the apparatus' and the 'opa[que]', 'overpowering conditions' could be deciphered – they are 'the work of humans [Menschenwerk]' (VSI 329) – he seems to think that the socialised society's complexity constitutes a problem. In capitalism, 'the apparatuses of production, distribution and domination, as well as economic and social relations and ideologies are inextricably interwoven' (ND 264). Sociology, Adorno warns his students, 'has to do with an infinitely complex object, even if this object does not confront us in [a] . . . complex

form' (IS 83).[11] His warning may invite the sceptical reply that the adaptation of all facets of the world to one form of socially organised production and distribution should facilitate social research (see PETG 72–3). Yet in adapting the world to contemporary 'capitalism', integration is adapting phenomena to 'something immensely complicated and ... immensely complex' (PETG 163), recalcitrant to conceptual explication (PETG 44–5). The task of theoretically investigating individual social phenomena with reference to this densely interwoven web of social relations is extremely hard to master.

In another passage, Adorno carefully heeds the possibility that 'modern society' is 'objectively' less 'opaque' than it seems 'to sociologists'; that the 'age of large organisations' has the 'tendency' to remove 'complex social mechanisms of mediation'; and that the incomprehensibility of society may be a 'projection' of those no longer able to live independently within it (SSI 523). Yet even if this is the case – and Adorno hesitates to affirm it – a further predicament remains. Theoretical analyses would need to relate the empirical material's social dimension to society's *historical* context: to interpret the fact in its 'eminent historicity, its historical implications', not 'as something natural' and 'unalterable' (IS 149). Social integration, which culminates in the reification and solidification of social life, frustrates this endeavour. 'The more unrelentingly socialisation seizes all moments of human and interpersonal immediacy, the more impossible to remember the having-become [das Gewordensein] of the web; the more irresistible the semblance of nature' (ND 351). Society hides its human reality and 'confronts us as something strange, objectified, reified' (PETG 151). '[T]he moment of the non-transparent and opaque ... constitutively belongs to the concept of' a 'society' which has come to operate 'above the heads of humans'. It is no coincidence, Adorno repeats, that 'Durkheim ... defined the social fact ... through ... constraint', 'equated the blind, collective regularity [Regelhaftigkeit] with the actual object of sociology', and, 'in contradistinction to the teaching of ... Weber', described this object as 'not "comprehensible"' (SSI 503). 'Only an accomplished theory of society could say what society is': 'could' implies that in 1966, after decades of study, Adorno still feels unable to do that (S 146). As elaborated in Chapter 1, the most instructive perspective on exchange society and the single phenomena it regulates attainable by theory today is a double perspective which holds conflicting notions of society as invariant object and human, historical process in suspense.

[11] '[I]n the web of the through and through socialised humans, an ever larger measure of structures and contexts confronts the individual no longer as a comprehensible but as an overwhelming fact', the authors of *Group Experiment* explain (GEX 16).

Adorno's discussions of estrangement, dependence and integration proved as thoroughgoing as exchange society proved elusive. Adorno repeatedly arrives at statements on society such as: 'both . . . that [all living things] *are* under a spell and that they *appear* to be under a spell, are probably equally valid' (HF 173). Given these 'difficulties with really penetrating present society' (PETG 12), theoretical interpretations of the material's social dimension – of its mediation by the social whole regulating observations as well as the objects and social phenomena observed – will currently scarcely be completed and regularly yield inconclusive results. Theory can offer perspectives on the data's social dimension, on social phenomena governed by exchange society and on exchange society itself. This allows it to unsettle facts, which obstruct such perspectives. But sociologists face serious obstacles to mastering their analytical tasks conclusively.[12]

Hence the investigation must continue. For Adorno, this means abiding by his conviction outlined earlier. Without empirical facts, sociology would become 'rampant, unbridled theory' (IS 25, see also PETG 25). Sociology must saturate itself anew with material. Yet factual reconstructions of reality are socially limited. Sociological data are in turn always subject to the theoretical examination of their social dimension – an endeavour which is currently unlikely to succeed, so sociologists are faced with the task of re-engaging with facts once more.

'The greatest danger threatening this discipline today', Adorno accordingly cautions his sociology students, 'is that of becoming polarized . . . into the mere observation of facts [Tatsachenfeststellung] on the one hand, and the irresponsible declamation of true or alleged insight into the essence of things, on the other' (IS 21–2, see also PETG 105, VSII 644). Adorno sees only one way of avoiding this danger: sociologists must ensure the interaction between establishing empirical material and its critical theoretical interpretation (IS 25, 34, SSI 186, 486–7). '[W]ithout a theory of the whole . . . there is no productive individual finding [Einzelfeststellung]; without immersion in empiry . . . the truest theory can degenerate into a delusional system. The tension between both poles is the vital element of our science' (VSII 706); 'their reciprocity [Wechselwirkung] . . . constitutes the concept of the dialectic' (IS 25). This process of 'relat[ing] to facts' and 'mov[ing] by criticizing them' (MM 126) cannot be interrupted. Observation and theoretical analysis are incessantly referred to one another.

[12] Bonß (1983: 207) describes Adorno's 'tentativ[e]' theoretical penetration and intercon nection of seemingly unrelated fragments of social life as 'experimental testing of theo retical outlines [Entwürfe]'.

A mode of thinking which can neither develop pure thought constructs nor accept socially limited facts for reality can no longer fulfil the demand for final positive knowledge (see also CM 16–17).[13] Reflections on sociological material certainly offer perspectives on empirical phenomena in light of their social dimension, and even spotlight aspects of the social whole. Yet as long as these perspectives remain partial and inconclusive, theory remains a 'thought about the results' which 'is never … a seizable result' itself. Sociology must always re-engage with factual material. However, the material is untrustworthy and hence no sociological result either: 'every formulation of a problem in the humanities or social sciences [geisteswissenschaftliche Problemstellung], be it a statistical diagnosis of modern sociology, urges, so as to be cognition at all, towards philosophical theory' (VSI 354). Faced on one side with inconclusive, even conflicting theoretical perspectives and on the other with the socially conditioned incongruence between reality and its empirical reconstruction, sociological thought assumes the role of continuously exposing those conflicts and this incongruence. Thought moves through repeatedly exhibiting the gap between concept and reality by negating the claim of factual reconstructions to represent reality trustworthily and by exposing the contradictions of theoretical analyses of empirical phenomena governed by exchange society. '[U]nderstanding and interpreting', Adorno states, 'entails negation' (HF 134). In sociology, it entails the simultaneous critical negation of empirical material and theoretical statements. Sociology is neither conclusive theory nor grounded in facts and figures. It is relentless demythologisation.

Perpetual negation generates 'consciousness of non-identity' (ND 17). Non-identity, Adorno specifies, designates that 'concept and … thing … are not one' (HTS 70–1, NLII 63). One or more properties of reality elude its conception, or reality lacks properties its conception ascribes to it. Negation as recognition of non-identity highlights 'the impossibility of capturing in subjective concepts without surplus what is not of the subject' (AE 147). Evidently, non-identity thinking yields little by way of positive knowledge. Adorno admits that negative, unpositioned meditations cause vertigo (ND 42).[14] Yet he is convinced that as long as reflection can exhibit cognitive failures, including the social limitations of factual

[13] *Group Experiment*, Adorno emphasises, is not called 'experiment' for nothing (GS9.2 378).

[14] Adorno's 1966 concession might have been motivated by a conversation with Kracauer in 1960: 'I told Teddie that many of his articles … made me just dizzy; that I had often the feeling that other interpretations might be as conclusive … I traced … my dizziness to the fact that he seemingly deals in substances without, however, actually being attached to any substance. Hence the arbitrariness, the lack of orientation' (A&K 514).

reconstructions of reality and the shortcomings and conflicts of theoretical analyses, the assertion of non-identity is imperative.

Experiencing society 'That is little enough', to use a phrase Adorno (MCP 125) borrows from Bloch (2000: 165). The 'whole demand of cognition . . . does not consist in mere perceiving, classifying, and calculating but precisely in the determining negation of the respectively immediate' (DE 20). Yet theory provides few positive results. Adorno's reflections on the sociology of exchange society, which simultaneously takes place in this society, unearth severe problems from its theoretical dimension. Nevertheless, theoretical analysis has the capacity to sharpen sociology's focus on social reality. The reciprocity between empirical observation and theoretical interpretation enables sociology to obtain perspectives on phenomena in relation to exchange society and on exchange society itself which are beyond the reach of empirical observation, notwithstanding that these perspectives are open to further scrutiny.

Theoretical negation creates a further opportunity for greater awareness of society. Analyses of the material's social dimension suggest that society is a force governing subjective thought and the objective world. Reaching for perspectives on phenomena in their social mediation and on the 'total system' (PD 32) manifesting in facts, theory also highlights that without interpretation, the material's social dimension remains opaque. Theory negates the identity – exposes the non-identity – of factual reconstructions and reality. By unsettling facts as flawed because they fail to represent social reality adequately, negation stresses that society holds power over all subjects and objects as well as remaining intangible to immediate observation. Critical thought generates the experience of the '[i]mpenetrability and strangeness of the whole . . . which lies beyond the grasp of immediate . . . experience' (P 89). The subject gains consciousness of exchange society in its closely integrated, frozen state, in which it befalls individuals as omnipresent yet intangible essence. The experience of the contradiction between conceptions of reality and reality involves an experience of the strange and solid world surrounding humans. That is little enough, but it is not nothing.

So little is it, though, that even the experience of society *qua* impenetrable instance is unacceptable as a conclusion. '[T]he essential laws of society . . . are more real than the factual, within which they appear and which deceptively conceals them', but society is neither absolute, nor intransigent. The 'essential laws . . . shed the conventional attributes of their essentiality [Wesenhaftigkeit]'. Only where negation can proceed to dispute society's essentiality can it keep contributing to a proper

awareness of exchange society. Here negation reaches the limits of its services to sociology. Disputing the equation of society and essence is not enough: society's 'essential laws ... would have to be named as the negativity, which makes the world the way that it is, brought to its concept' (ND 171). Society would have to be deciphered as an 'antagonistic structure' consisting of 'relationships which are reified and nevertheless [relationships] of living subjects'. 'Where social experience perceives domination', for instance, 'the historical explanation of the latter is the task of critical theory' (SSI 194). Sociology cannot but continue its inquiries into exchange society in close touch with empirical material and in view of its social dimension. 'The estrangement of living humans from the reified social powers could be penetrated only by a theory which derives this estrangement itself from the social conditions' (VSII 676).

Ultimately, sociological theory aims to fulfil a demand Horkheimer and Adorno raise for cognition generally: to decipher empirical materials 'as mediated conceptual moments which are only fulfilled by revealing their social, historical, human meaning' (DE 20). The subjective contributions to establishing empirical material would have to be read as human activity in specific social conditions. The conditions regulating subjective observation – *prima vista* invisible and initially emerging as essential – are not 'ahistorically identical, transcendental, but ... changing and historically comprehensible' (Adorno 1977: 125). Moreover, theory must decipher society inside the single social phenomenon – unobservable and initially experienced as petrified objectivity – as the human product that it is, and 'test ... insights into essence [Wesenseinsichten] against the ... historical conditions under which the phenomenon ... has come into being' (IS 22). The ideas covered in this chapter provide more depth on the theoretical tasks of sociology compared with the considerations in Chapter 1. What re-emerges as sociologically instructive in this context, though, is precisely the double perspective – correspondent with sociology's double character – of society as a petrified, reified, estranged authority which is nonetheless the work of humans and historically transformable.

Theory in sociological research

It is not immediately evident how the methodological considerations above translate into social research practice. A better grasp of the theoretical dimension of Adorno's sociology hinges on understanding the operation of theoretical analysis in his sociological investigations of

specific social phenomena. Several of Adorno's works illustrate this operation. The next two sections draw upon writings from 1938 to 1953 and from the 1960s respectively. This distinction is not primarily chronologically motivated, but reflects differences in the ways in which theoretical analysis manifests itself in the two bodies of text.

Reflections on mass culture

Chapter 2 saw Adorno's American sociology draw materials from various empirical sources. Regardless of their source, Adorno deems such factual reconstructions untrustworthy because they conceal their social dimension. The following passages illustrate his corresponding efforts to discern the sociological material's social dimension with the help of the concepts informing his theory of exchange society. By revealing what the material conceals, theory not only suggests new perspectives on social life but also unsettles the claim of facts to being sound representations of reality.

Theorising radio Adorno's involvement in Lazarsfeld's 1930s radio research highlights the impact of his concern with theoretical analysis on his sociology. The fact that Adorno was 'simply too theoretical' (Jenemann 2007: 18) by Lazarsfeld's standards seems to have contributed significantly to the well-known frictions between the two émigrés. Adorno had crafted theoretical frames around musico-sociological questions (1991a: 29–60), intending to employ them in the project's investigations of radio and listener reactions (CM 218). Lazarsfeld (1941: 2–8) embraced 'administrative research'. This involved empirical research on which types of audiences – given certain attributes, predispositions, habits, circumstances etc. – consumed different media and their contents. Administrative research also sought to observe how media contents were received: whether broadcasts were liked or disliked, how they were understood and responded to, or how they affected people's thinking and behaviour. Such studies were often conducted at the behest of agencies seeking to use radio, newspapers or other media to influence the public. Though a self-described 'European positivist', Lazarsfeld (1941: 14–16; 1968: 271, 322–6) had sympathy for the concerns of Horkheimer's 'Frankfurt group'. He wished for co-operation between critical and administrative sociology, especially between Adorno's theoretical work and empirical research, hoping that the conceptual frames could help in gathering and elucidating data. Adorno found that the sociology he was to contribute to thus granted theory merely a 'supplementary' role, rendering it obsolete once the data were obtained. He could not assent to this (CM 223, 227–8, see also CoM 477). Adorno's objective was a critical

theoretical examination of factual materials, not conceptual guidance for their collection and clarification.[15]

Adorno's 'radio physiognomics' begins to flesh out this vision. Both radio music and listener reactions, Adorno argues, are socially mediated. Radio music is a commodity: the impact of compositional standardisation (1941: 17–24; 1945: 210–12, 216–17), repetitive 'plugging' (1941: 27–32) and radio technology (1938: 23–4, 28; 1945: 209; 1979) on music must be understood in relation to the socially dominant exchange principle. This is consistent with Adorno's conviction that productive forces are fettered by social relations (see also CoM 60–1). Standardised, relentlessly plugged, commodified music, he adds, is met with complete recognition, automatic reactions and 'commodity listening', e.g. the exaggerated fascination with priceless instruments or the focus on a series of gustatory passages instead of intellectually active experiences of integrated artistic wholes (1941: 21–4, 32–7; 1945: 211–15). Sociologists gathering empirical material on listeners must simultaneously ask 'in how far . . . subjective reactions of test-persons are . . . spontaneous and immediate . . ., or in how far there stand behind them . . . the dissemination mechanisms and the apparatus's power of suggestion, . . . the objective implications of the media and the material with which the listeners are confronted – and ultimately widely overarching social structures up to that of the whole of society' (CM 220).

No 'treatment of superficial data' can unveil the 'moving forces' behind them (CoM 110). Only theoretical analyses of the material allow sociologists 'to understand [listeners] better than they understand themselves' (1945: 216, see also 1938: 4) and radio better than the facts present it. 'Nothing . . . is "too far-fetched" . . . [T]he more [our statements] transcend the limited and immediate situation and consistently relate it to basic social conditions, the more valuable they are' (CoM 103). Music consumption, Adorno speculates for instance, furthers social integration: pop music's 'soporific' effect distracts listeners from the workday and the economic threats they constantly face; spare-time relaxation is meant to reproduce their labour capacity for capitalist production; and the illusion of free choice covers up the consumers' misery in social dependence (1941: 37–9; 1945: 212, 216). According to Adorno's 'social phenomenology' of standardised hit songs (CM 226), listeners have been trained to prefer the largely major- and minor-related tonal make-up of the music of their childhood surroundings. The industry imitated these musical patterns. Once a song was commercially successful, its model was incessantly

[15] On Adorno's relationship with Lazarsfeld and the rise of administrative research in the USA, see Jenemann 2007: 1 46; see also Morrison 1978; Rose 1978: 97 9.

repeated and became the frozen standard for all hit compositions. The songs' superficial, schematic 'pseudo-individualisations' keep music within those naturalised boundaries of marketability, while nonetheless offering listeners, who would punish lack of variety with slackening consumption, stimuli they perceive as new (1941: 22–6). Plugging – the glamorous presentation and replaying of songs, 'pseudo-expert' discourses on styles and musicians etc. – further ensures that even standardised music is not forgotten the minute it is heard (1941: 27–32). Most of these perspectives on radio phenomena are established by theoretical examinations of the data's hidden social dimension. '[S]ticking to the facts' would be 'illusory' (CoM 104–5).[16]

Analysing fascism In 1943, after parting ways with Lazarsfeld, Adorno was still investigating radio material, but his attention had shifted to content analyses of Martin Luther Thomas's speeches. The study was part of Adorno's reaction to the politics of the day. In mid-1930s California, Thomas had 'attempted to launch a religiously framed, politically oriented fascist organization . . . "the Christian American Crusade"' (Cavalletto 2007: 133). As the following two examples illustrate, the Thomas project, too, was informed by Adorno's efforts to penetrate the untrustworthy factual surface theoretically and scrutinise the rhetorical stimuli in view of typical reactions and underlying social dimensions (see CM 237).[17]

The study's first part investigates the appeal of Thomas's self-characterisation, e.g. his self-portrayal as a 'great little man', powerful and grand yet impecunious and petty. Adorno explores the allure of this image in relation to the listeners' psyche in capitalism. Listeners are attracted to the great moneyless man, because in the distressing conditions of dependence and estrangement, where people deem themselves at the mercy of 'huge blind economic forces', hearing that even grand personalities face economic insecurities reduces the shamefulness of their own. The orator's appeal for cash further gratifies individuals, because they imagine that despite their exigencies they can support someone significant. Under the illusion that greatness and littleness cohere, even the poor feel 'elevated' (GS9.1 28–33).

Adorno revisited the 'great little man' image in subsequent years, each time with a slightly different analytical emphasis. A 1949 piece points out that the agitator posing as a friendly neighbour takes advantage of people's

[16] See Jenemann 2007: 47 104, for a detailed discussion of Adorno's radio research.

[17] Apostolidis (2000: 71 89) and Cavalletto (2007: 127 71) provide elaborate discussions. See especially Cavalletto's (2007: 155 67) notion of 'theorizing by elucidation'.

desire for 'genuine relationships' in an industrialised society where 'technification and specialization disrupt' interpersonal relations (VSI 283–4). A more elaborate 1951 study reconfigures the problem in Freudian terms. Since in current conditions the subject cannot fulfil its 'ego demands', narcissistic love is precarious. This triggers a displacement of libido: it is no longer the ego, nor the ego-ideal, but the idealised leader, who receives a large part of the energy formerly nourishing self-love.[18] The 'great little man' attracts this energy: his putative grandeur makes him loveable without frustration; his ostensible similarity with his petty listeners allows them to reconcile their remaining traces of self-love with their love for him (SSI 419–21). Identifications among listeners subsequently establish a group following (SSI 417). The leader's followers identify with each other on the basis of sharing the replacement of their ego ideals with the same leader image (SSI 419; Freud 1955: 107–8, 116).

In another passage of the Thomas study, Adorno's quest for critical analysis pushes beyond sociology's methodological and substantive dimension. Thomas, Adorno (GS9.1 114–15, see also SSI 401) emphasises, almost exclusively presents 'opaque, isolated . . . images of facts'. The agitator knows that if he engaged in 'consequent, coherent and consistent thinking', namely 'autonomous logical processes', he would not only offer a basis for challenging him to 'those at whom [he] wants to strike', but also defy the incoherent, 'unrelated . . . facts' he presents, and he would threaten to undermine his message. Adorno implies that theoretically scrutinising factual material is not a purely sociologico-methodological issue, but that his readers are to reflect upon whatever they are fed as data in their own everyday lives. Critical scrutiny of empirical immediacy supports people's political resistance to fascist propaganda.[19] Adorno, the persecutee in 1943, does not have the luxury of doubting the necessity of such resistance.

Psychological and sociological concepts also guided Adorno's involvement in the research for *The Authoritarian Personality*. In determining personality trends and corresponding 'give-away items' – the very precondition for conducting the empirical study – researchers considered extant data as well as theoretical work (CM 234). For instance, the notion that items expressing 'superstition' indicated a weak ego which has given up on intervening in overpowering conditions and shifted responsibility to 'outside forces beyond one's control' (AP 236) was informed by psychological and social theory. Yet not even the laboriously established data of

[18] See Freud 1955: 109 13, 129 30; 1957: 93 4, 99 100.
[19] The statement 'thinking per se refuses to become . . . a tool' (GS9.1 114) constitutes an early formulation of a point that would be significant to *Negative Dialectics* (ND 30).

The Authoritarian Personality were trusted as representations of reality. Only theoretical interpretations could access the material's hidden psychological and social dimensions. '[I]ntended as an empirical investigation', the study, Adorno (SoI 185) states retrospectively, eventually conflicted with the rules of empirical research due to its strong speculative tendencies. For Adorno, it was precisely its theoretical foray into the hidden dimensions of the psychological facts that rendered the project richer in socio-psychological and sociological insights than efforts limited to empirical procedures and materials.

The Authoritarian Personality's 'interpretations', Jahoda (1954: 12) emphasises, 'are performed in terms of psychoanalytic theory'. Turner (2002: 155–8) argues that Adorno treats historical-material conditions underlying the respondents' attitudinal patterns as mere background, instead of critically analysing them. Bauman (2000: 152–3) makes a similar point. Indeed, the study's authors repeatedly warn that their inquiry into personality has yielded only limited insights into social reality (AP 608, 661, 972–6).[20] Yet it is relevant for this sociological discussion that in several passages Adorno does attempt to decipher the data's social dimension. Anti-Semitic prejudice, including the distinction 'good Jew/bad Jew' (AP 622–7), he holds, is unrelated to the characteristics of the Jews (AP 609). Stereotypy is a 'means for pseudo-orientation in an estranged world' (AP 622, see also 608). The opacity of contemporary capitalism, which defies people's critical-analytical scrutiny, fosters their ignorance about, and lack of interest in, political matters (AP 658–63; see also Buck-Morss 1977: 183–4). Individuals tackle their confusion with misleading intellectual compasses, which also include political stereotypes (AP 662–9), blaming bureaucrats for all ills (AP 693–5) or ascribing an unrealistic degree of power to politicians (AP 669–71).[21] This latter issue of 'personalisation', a subjective device for 're-translat[ing] the abstract and impenetrable character of' social relations and conditions 'into . . . living experience', recurs frequently in Adorno's later sociological work (SSI 188, see also CM 63, OL 426, PETG 59–61). One of *The Authoritarian Personality*'s central sociological findings is summarised thus: 'The objectification of social processes, their obedience to intrinsic supra-individual laws, seems to result in an intellectual alienation of the individual from society. This alienation is experienced by the individual as

[20] It is another matter to have *The Authoritarian Personality* suggest Adorno's retreat from Marxist social analysis, especially since in 1940s America he probably felt under political pressure to veil his Marxist orientation (Rubin 2002: 173 4).

[21] Low 'fascism' scorers Adorno seems to see his political point reinforced tend to reject labels and reflect on their personal perceptions of the world (AP 644 52).

disorientation, with the concomitant fear and uncertainty . . . [S]tereotypy and personalization can be understood as devices for overcoming this uncomfortable state of affairs' (AP 618). The 'industrial standardization of innumerable phenomena of modern life', Adorno adds, partly explains why 'stereotypical thinking' is so common today (AP 665). Here society's quasi-autonomous operation, social petrifaction, estrangement and the homogenising force of commodity exchange are foregrounded as conditions for the respondents' attitudes. This is consistent with Adorno's critical theory of capitalism – outlined in Chapter 1 and revisited in Chapter 4 below – as a coagulated, estranged totality generating confusion and fear, and as an encompassing context of exchange relations adjusting thought to the identity principle. Transforming the potentially fascist personality, the authors conclude, hinges on 'chang[ing] . . . the total organization of society' (AP 975).

Stars under scrutiny During 1952–3, Adorno worked for the Californian Hacker Foundation. The foundation was linked to a clinic interested in psychiatric, psychological and socio-psychological research, which Adorno sought to 'accentuat[e] . . . sociologically' (GS9.2 11). Adorno's main production was the aforementioned qualitative content analysis of astrology, focused on the stars column of the 'right wing' *Los Angeles Times* (SDE 56). Like earlier studies, Adorno's interpretations of the texts employed psychoanalytical and sociological concepts – including his theory of the culture industry (DE 94–136) and occultism (SDE 172–80) – for tackling the data's hidden social dimension.

A selection of passages illustrates this.[22] Although, Adorno concedes, the column's astral ideology is ultimately irrational, people's 'susceptibility' to it 'is kept awake by certain social and psychological conditions' (SDE 49). The blindly reproduced, reified, solidified whole of capitalism generates the experience of society as arbitrary, daunting fate. Reading astrology mollifies this experience. The projection of the fateful social system onto the stars lends it 'higher . . . dignity and justification', while 'the idea that the stars, if one only reads them correctly, offer some advice, mitigates the . . . fear of the inexorability of social processes' (SDE 57–8). The narcissist is particularly excited by this. 'To him, astrology, just as other irrational creeds like racism, provides a short cut by bringing the complex to a handy formula and offering . . . the pleasant gratification that he who feels . . . excluded from educational privileges nevertheless belongs to the minority of those . . . "in the know"' (SDE 61).

[22] Bernstein (in Adorno 1991a: 12 16) and Witkin (2003: 68 82) discuss further aspects of the study's substance.

The 'promise of help . . . granted by a superhuman agency' also ameliorates the misery of the socially '*dependent*, who find themselves incessantly in situations which they cannot cope with by their own powers' (SDE 74). The column's 'soothing overtone . . . reassure[s] the reader . . . that "everything will be fine," overcoming his apprehensions by establishing some magical confidence in the good turn of events' (SDE 76). Extra gratification ensues from astrology's message that solving the predicaments of life is exclusively up to the individual and his observation of the stars' – often practical, 'down to earth' (see SDE 72–3) – advice on how to deal with himself in the world (SDE 78–9). Astrology is by no means the harmless aberration it may appear to be at first sight: by giving the status quo ideological legitimacy, the astrology column encourages readers to adapt and to integrate.

Adorno's theoretical analysis of the hidden social dimension of a range of further items reveals that promoting conformity constitutes astrology's '*over-all rule*' (SDE 80). The column's temporal dimension is particularly effective. Exchange society requires individuals to function both as workers and as consumers. Astrology offers its readers a biphasic guide – purportedly attuned to a cosmic rhythm – for reconciling these antinomies. Work tasks, especially putatively necessary but senseless chores, atone for pleasure and are assigned to the a.m.; play and pleasure reward work and are assigned to the p.m. Readers gladly accept this orientation device as a natural reference point. Their performance for exchange is secured: the a.m./p.m. plan neither allows production to spoil consumption nor consumption to distract from production's meaningless machine-like operations (SDE 89–101).

On closer scrutiny, however, the formulaic astral prescription of various modes of happiness only permits pleasure that 'serves . . . *some ulterior purpose of . . . self promotion*' (SDE 101). A jolly appearance conduces to being deemed successful; attending parties, sprees and trips expands one's network; accepting invitations (whether you like it or not) serves to maintain one's status; even romances can push one's career. Just like the functional orgies in Huxley's novel ensnare individuals in the apparatus of the Brave New World (SDE 102–3), fun, although a p.m. activity, serves a.m.'s labour and unites the subject with society's productivist imperative.

These passages display Adorno's doubts that sociological material discloses its social dimension and his efforts to scrutinise data as symptoms of social tendencies with the help of his theory of exchange society's weightiest aspects: solidification, estrangement, dependence, integration, exchange principle (SDE 153–66). Shedding light on what the material hides, these theoretical analyses persistently unsettle its

cognitive value. In the final section of his study, Adorno states: 'just as adherents of philosophical empiricism seem to be more susceptible for organized secondary superstition than speculative thinkers, extreme empiricism, teaching absolute obedience of the mind to given data, "facts," has no principle such as the idea of reason, by which to distinguish the possible from the impossible'. A 'mentality' develops which is 'often no longer able to resist mythological temptations' (SDE 158). Adorno associates the social researcher's trust in empirical data, conceived as an uncritical belief in factual reconstructions which hide their social dimension, with the superstitious view of the world in terms of astral 'facts', which Adorno has also just presented as glossing over social trends. His sociological work in America thus closes with an intensely provocative appeal to mistrust socially limited sociological data and examine them theoretically.

The *theoretical* dimension of 'Stars Down to Earth' underlines why 'content analysis' is no misnomer for Adorno's sociological engagement with texts. His *empirical* treatment of documents seems more affinitive with the procedures of discourse analysis. Language, discourse analysts emphasise, is no mere epiphenomenon but a form of social action (Gill 2000: 174–5). Even astrological writings, Adorno concurs, fulfil important psychological and social functions. What discourse analysts tend to deny, however, is that texts can be 'a pathway to some other reality' (Gill 2000: 175). They insist on studying 'the text in its own right' (Gill 2000: 177). Content analysts, by contrast, regard texts not only as influencing the social world, but simultaneously as a 'medium of expression' of prevalent 'worldviews, values, attitudes, opinions, prejudices and stereotypes' (Bauer 2000: 133–4). Content analysis means analysing these contexts through texts. Adorno treats astrological literature as an expression of the intellectual and social conditions of commodity capitalism. The sociological analysis of texts involves ascertaining these conditions, which, albeit produced and reproduced by human actions, including speaking and writing, have come to operate as if they were independent. Social conditions shape these human actions in turn.

Results or reciprocity? Vis-à-vis capitalist conditions recalcitrant to decipherment, theoretical assertions, Adorno warns, must be viewed with circumspection. By tackling the material's social dimension, theoretical analysis unsettles the material and provides instructive perspectives on phenomena in social mediation and on exchange society. But these perspectives are rarely exhaustive of the matter and often resist reconciliation. Theory does not amount to a satisfactory explanation or conclusive

decryption of social phenomena. Their investigation must continue. This means conducting further empirical research, engaging with new material, which demands theoretical scrutiny in turn. Theory and observation enter into a reciprocal relation.

It is difficult to identify this trajectory in Adorno's American sociology. His interpretations appear to claim an unwarranted degree of definiteness, glossing over the problems of theoretical sociological analysis presented by his methodological work. Relentlessly critical of sociological material, Adorno's interpretations, it seems, do not then enter into a reciprocal relation with new data. He deciphers new material with his established analytical frameworks or new ideas. But instances where he fundamentally challenges his theoretical assertions before proceeding to re-engage with new data appear to be rare. His theoretical assertions read like statements fancying themselves as representations of the material's final truth in the form of a theory of exchange society. In the Thomas study, psychoanalytic and particularly social theory certainly had 'primacy' over the material (Cavalletto 2007: 164–5). Adorno's radio writings even contain a list of 'axioms' about capitalist commodity society (1945: 210–11). Did Adorno grant theoretical assertions the status of conclusions – perhaps in reaction to an American scientific milieu which he felt (CM 242) overvalued empirical material and downgraded theory to refutable hypotheses?

This question requires a careful critical response. Adorno denies that his analyses have reached conclusions and states the need for continued investigation in relation to all the studies discussed. The radio writings are described as 'models' for further empirical inquiry. New material could 'correct' – whereby he seems to mean 'refine' rather than 'falsify' – 'the theorems' (CM 227). Thus Adorno at least intended to stay true to his announcement to Lazarsfeld (A&H2 427) that the 'dialectical method' would maintain 'a reciprocal relation' – an 'interdependence' (1938: i), 'interw[eaving]' (1938: 6) or 'interplay' (CoM 446) – between theory and empirical research. The Thomas study, reports Adorno's wife, was also never regarded as exhaustive or conclusive. I mentioned the different theoretical perspectives on the 'great little man' Adorno held over the years. He might have denied that they amount to a complete theoretical framework. Adorno, Gretel Adorno continues, understood the study of the Thomas transcripts as a text-based counterpart of *The Authoritarian Personality* (A&H4 758), which continues investigations on the basis of new empirical inquiries into subjects. *The Authoritarian Personality*'s theoretical considerations, the authors caution, should not be read as conclusive either – even if they appear plain – but 'as hypotheses for further research' (AP 604). For Bonß (1983: 215), they are not 'results' but

'"open" offers of interpretation [Interpretationsangebote]': 'uncertain and preliminary', but capable of providing new 'perspective[s]'. 'Stars Down to Earth' might be read as investigations of some of the theoretical ideas informing Adorno's earlier studies on fascism and stereotypy with reference to new – namely textual – data (see Crook in SDE 13–24).[23] The astrology piece's 'results', too, 'must by necessity be regarded as tentative', awaiting more empirical material, especially on readers (SDE 54).[24] Given Adorno's denials that his theoretical assertions are final and plans to conduct further empirical research, it might be wrong to construe that he intended those assertions as conclusions, inconsistent with his methodological warnings of the precariousness of theoretical reflections on, and in, exchange society. Nonetheless, many theoretical statements in Adorno's American sociology, articulating his perspectives on phenomena in their social mediation and on the social whole, ring as conclusive. This seems to be partly due to the fact that most of his plans to re-examine the theoretical problems persistently with reference to new data remained unrealised. As a result, some criticisms of this part of Adorno's *oeuvre* are hard to dismiss. Witkin (2003: 117) complains that Adorno's radio research ultimately mainly 'illustrated his theory'.[25] Kellner (2002: 99–103) argues that Adorno's failure to consider artefacts of oppositional subcultures from outside the culture industry, which express rebellion over conformity, render his theoretical interpretations of popular music one-sided. For Hyman and Sheatsley (1954: 102), Adorno's analytical sections in *The Authoritarian Personality* exempt 'judgements' from 'scientific restraint' and let the theoretical 'diagnoses' run 'rampant'. Crook (SDE 25–8) questions the value of Adorno's statements on listener and reader reactions because they are based on studies of radio speeches and astrological literature, rather than of listeners and readers,[26] and notes Adorno's neglect of the gender dimensions of those reactions due to his overreliance on Freudian theory.

A sociology in which theory is inconclusive and requires renewed confrontation with data which are always limited and subject to renewed

[23] *Group Experiment* could also be seen as developing ideas from Adorno's earlier fascism research in relation to new data.

[24] Wiggershaus's (1994: 458) criticism that Adorno 'did not mention any objective data' is misleading. Adorno regarded the column's text as empirical which is what Wiggershaus appears to mean by 'objective' data. Strictly speaking, for Adorno data are never 'objective' but untrustworthy subjective reconstructions (see Bonß 1983: 209).

[25] Lazarsfeld's (A&H2 436) accusation that Adorno 'disregard[ed] . . . evidence' is problem atic: for Adorno, nothing empirical is evidence, neither as verification (e.g. PD 69) nor as falsification of theory. Adorno sometimes (AP 603) mentions empirical data as 'evidence', but clearly does not treat them as such.

[26] See also Honneth 1991: 81, and Cavalletto 2007: 167.

theoretical critique has difficulties offering positive results. Although some of Adorno's American sociological writings read as if theory did not face these difficulties, occasional emphases on negation are noticeable. His radio research, Adorno cautions, is an 'experiment in theory' (1938: 2). Some media analysts answer the question how radio, music and listeners interact by claiming that radio brings high culture to ever more people (1979: 110–13). Adorno's 'The Radio Symphony' presents no comprehensive alternative result. He makes the specific point that radio transmission – and repetition 'ad nauseam' (1972: 128) – transforms symphonic music and its reception (1979: 113–35). This enables Adorno mainly to challenge the conclusion that radio is an adequate means of fostering conscious experiences of the original works and to question the power of empirical records of listener reactions to underpin that conclusion (1979: 112, 135–9). *A Social Critique of Radio Music* chiefly proposes a rival approach to administrative research. Administrative research answers questions like 'How can radio bring good music to large numbers of people?' with reference to data on listener responses to stimuli. Adorno steers clear of answering this question. Since radio transmission infringes on 'good music'; and since in capitalist conditions, where music is commodified, the masses, socialised into commodity listening, are incapable of genuinely experiencing 'good music' (1945: 208–11), the very possibility to achieve the stated aim is in doubt. His radio writings, Adorno explains, focus on negating the 'untrue image' of music on the radio and exposing the social conditions of this 'untruth' (CM 226). *The Authoritarian Personality*'s 'gain' lies not in the 'absolute conclusiveness of its positive insights' either, 'but primarily in the conception of the problem'. It is a 'pilot study', 'explor[ing] ... possibilities' rather than offering 'irrefutable results' (CM 235). Horkheimer's (1985: 263) statement that his friend's 'sociological research ... contravenes empiricism no less than conclusive theory' is perhaps one-sided, but it captures some of the orientation of this research.

Adorno's work in the USA between 1938 and 1953 is commonly read as his most exemplary sociological output. The American studies demonstrate Adorno's engagement with, and simultaneous distrust in, empirical material as well as showing his efforts to theoretically scrutinise the data's social dimension and undermine their cognitive status with the help of his theory of exchange society. However, these writings are not the most striking illustrations of the reciprocity and negativity of sociological analysis he was shown to envision above. For more thoroughgoing illustrations of the theoretical-analytical procedure in social research – including the elements of reciprocity and negativity – outlined in Adorno's

methodological writings, one must turn to works that are less often deemed central to his sociological *oeuvre*.

The rhythm of analysis

Adorno sees his writings as resistant to résumé (SSI 574).[27] The following discussions do not aim for summaries. Many of Adorno's arguments are so multifaceted and dependent on how he articulates them that synopsis runs the risk of covering up substantive complexity.[28] The objective is to consider another selection of Adorno's 1960s *Critical Models* to illustrate a specific aspect of his late sociology. The focus will be on highlighting how these texts manifest – more comprehensively than the American pieces – the elements of theoretical analysis discussed above: its role and modus operandi, its reciprocity and negativity, its experiential potential and its problems. Yet illustration is impossible without some engagement with the texts' argumentative contents, which, if it is not to distract from this discussion's thematic focus, must be synoptic. I hope to counterbalance the unavoidable disadvantages of condensing Adorno's argumentation by exposing a less transparent layer of these writings: the unswerving operation – underneath the web of diverse substantive points – of a persistent analytical strategy for sociological examinations of exchange society.

Analytical models In 1965, asked to contribute to a radio programme, Adorno wrote 'On the Question: "What Is German?"' The critic of stereotypy would not have asked this question himself – it was set by the station (CM 312). Instead of trying to resolve it, Adorno replies by mercilessly problematising it. More precisely put, Adorno treats the question as well as the facts putatively justifying and answering it as empirical material demanding investigation. This is consistent with the trend in his late sociology to draw material from personal encounters with social life's details. Of course, personal encounters do not escape the social limitations of observation either. Their materials bear hidden a characteristic twofold social dimension. Adorno seeks to analyse this dimension with the help of his theory of exchange society.

Adorno cannot even begin to reply to the question 'What is German?' without reflecting on the social conditions of reifying consciousness in their impact on the question and on the subject's answer. Both, he argues, adhere to typically capitalist identity thinking: the question by invoking a German essence subsuming the supposed nation's people, any answer by

[27] This is partly why Adorno is so hard to criticise (Kellner 2002: 105).
[28] See Chapter 5.

stereotyping. Such thought easily progresses towards a dangerous 'collective narcissism', idealising the in-group and denouncing the out-group (CM 205–6). The very possibility of pinpointing specifically German traits is thus suspicious.

Images of German uniqueness, Adorno continues, often highlight the nation's intellectual excellence and its people's reputation to 'do something for its own sake'. Kant, Goethe and Beethoven challenge the theoretical negation of German uniqueness. Their observable distinctness hints at that of German intellectual culture. Yet reflecting on the social dimension of this observation suggests that it is merely guided by commodity thinking, which makes of these figures German 'possessions' and 'brand[s]'. Germany's intellectual achievements require further scrutiny, namely in terms of their social dimension. The delay in capitalist development rendered Germany's cultural production somewhat resistant to commodification. The formula 'for its own sake' is appropriate, because the nation's intellectual life 'understood itself' as a 'being in-itself' not as 'an object of exchange'. Notwithstanding Adorno's initial scepticism, here German culture does seem to stand out, albeit historically, rather than, as it seems on the surface, naturally (CM 206–7). And even this insight is inconclusive. The German intellect was not entirely delivered up to commodity exchange, but it was still 'for-something-else', the state. As the idealist 'pathos of the absolute' indicates, it conspired with the political desire to subjugate the world. From this angle, the German intellect is as socialised as the intellect elsewhere (CM 208–9).

Yet surely the undeniable empirical fact of National Socialism alleviates all theoretical doubts about German uniqueness. Given that Germany was thinking in those absolutist, authoritarian terms, Adorno concedes, it is no accident that Hitler came to power there. Yet from another angle, Adorno also scrutinises and unsettles this fact, underlining that fascism is a 'socio-economi[c]', not a national problem and therefore not uniquely German. 'Such complexity', he insists, 'discourages any unambiguous answer to the question', 'What is German?' (CM 209). This is not a shortcoming of the analysis: social reality itself defies the sociologist's theoretical decryption.

Seeking to avoid skating over the difficulty of the matter for the sake of definite results, Adorno starts over. He resorts to his personal observations of Germanness with a 'more modes[t]' question: 'Why did I return?' The fact that the refugee returned to a country that had slaughtered millions and would have slain him too suggests that there must be something uniquely attractive about it. Adorno immediately qualifies this. Renewed reflections on the social conditions influencing his decision imply he may have just 'identifi[ed] with the familiar'. Also, his opposition

to the dominant powers before leaving made it equally difficult to integrate abroad, and the catastrophe made it imperative to return and struggle against its recurrence. This makes Adorno wary of subscribing to the idea of German specificity suggested by his observations. Back on the empirical level, however, Adorno concedes that Germany's resistance to the American attitude to 'keep smiling' distinguishes German culture. Simultaneously, he invites readers to reflect critically on the social dimension of this point: the American 'view of life' conceals the threatening contradictions of capitalist society – but so does the belief in a pure intellectual culture. The distinction between a German intellectual *Kultur* and an American 'culture' of 'refrigerators' may well be unfair (CM 209–10).

Counter to this theoretical assertion, recourse to the empirical domain of personal observations yields another suggestion of German cultural distinction. As mentioned, Adorno considers it a significant observation that in the USA, in contrast to Germany, his texts were edited to the point of being unrecognisable. Scrutinising this observation in a wider socio-historical context does not lead Adorno to dispute it. He surmises that Germany's 'economic backwardness', compared with the Anglo-Saxon world, left an exceptional 'refuge' for the intellect where it can, for now, hide from integration and commodification (CM 210–11).[29]

Theoretical sociological analysis manifests itself similarly in Adorno's 1969 essay 'Free Time'. Collected in *Catchwords*, this piece continues his work on the culture industry. Adorno sets out from a personal observation of a quotidian detail. He finds the question 'What is your hobby?' difficult: 'I have no hobby. Not that I'm a workaholic . . .', but reading and music are 'integral' to 'my existence' and defy the label 'hobby'. '[C]onversely, my work, philosophical and sociological production and university teaching, . . . has been so blissful to me that I am unable to express it within . . . opposition to free time'. Judged purely by his perception of the question, Adorno sees no difference between work and leisure. However, he concedes that such perceptions are untrustworthy and calls for reflection on the conditions shaping them. The distinction between work and spare time collapses only for someone granted such rare relative professional autonomy. The majority who depend on taking any job regardless of its content will have an alternative view (CM 168–9).

[29] Elsewhere, Adorno (1991a: 121) undermines his point that this was specific to Germany, arguing that Austrian and French radical art was only possible because in the early 1900s the 'administered world and social modernity' had not yet seized these countries completely.

Adorno subsequently proceeds to the empirical differences between work and free time. Similarly to the question 'Have you not been on holiday?', posed by co-workers astonished at one's pale skin in the summer, 'What is your hobby?' sounds like a directive that one must have one. Moreover, just as it is commonly accepted that production ought not to be distracted by play, people agree that leisure must not require any effort reminiscent of work. Theoretical decoding of these observations initially supports the implied distinction, albeit differently from how the co-workers perceive it. In capitalism's 'functional system', the separation between work and leisure testifies to the widespread yearning to escape quotidian boredom and conventions (CM 168–70). Where individuals spend their days working in conditions beyond their control, 'free time' intends a period free from that (CM 167).

Upon further reflection, the distinction between leisure and work collapses again. Yet the theoretical perspective Adorno offers here retains nothing of the blissful perception of their unity he set out from. Leisure products are commodities, dominated by the same exchange and profit principle that dominates work (CM 169–71). Indeed, capitalism is typified not only by the reification of labour and its products as commodities (CM 169), but also by humans treating themselves like things after work: in sunbathing 'merely for the sake of the tan . . . the fetish character of commodities seizes people . . .; they become fetishes to themselves' (CM 170). Many spare-time activities, albeit superfluous and uncreative, play on the pretence of real spontaneity, mollifying people's recognition that their productive capacities are fettered and their ability to transform the 'petrified relations' limited (CM 172–3). In reality, leisure as relaxation and sports reproduces labour power through rest and through enhancing fitness and team skills: leisure is fused with the workday (CM 169–70, 173–4).[30]

Further empirical observation also implies the sameness of work and free time. Some leisure activities, Adorno points out, bore their participants as much as work does. The analysis of its social dimension suggests that boredom after work reflects the ever-same world of commercially determined leisure, while boredom at work reflects the standardised tasks of a meticulously divided production process. Boredom is further fuelled by people's notion that they cannot transform their lives in the overpowering social conditions and that they must even surrender their imagination in order to adjust to those conditions for survival (CM 171–2). The complexities created by the changing perspectives on free time in

[30] See Morgan 1988 on Adorno's views on sports.

exchange society are evident. A puzzled Adorno admits: 'In the age of truly unparalleled social integration, it is difficult to make out at all, what in humans would be other than functionally determined' (CM 167).

Full accounts of the arguments in Adorno's theoretical analyses would require longer discussions of the two texts. I aimed to distil passages that illustrate his efforts to scrutinise empirical data with a view to their social dimension and with a view to what they express of exchange society. Adorno persistently examines to what extent factual reconstructions are merely the upshot of the social conditions of observation and how phenomena themselves are socially characterised. This operation repeatedly 'strikes' the material in which these dimensions hide like lightning and vaporises the factual material's claim to represent reality faithfully.

Reciprocity and negativity Upon reading Adorno's *Minima Moralia*, Kracauer wrote to his friend:

> Really, Teddie, ... when I found an interpretation one sided or it seemed dissat isfactory to me for some other reason, a passage followed shortly thereafter which revised or added to your first position ... It was ... as though you had been looking over my shoulder, or even into me, smiled about my scruples, and held out to me the next member of the thought, a thought which already anticipated, and mostly superseded still, what I wanted to say to you. (A&K 456)

Kracauer expresses a sociologico-methodological problem which is more serious than his formulations suggest. This problem is visible in Adorno's *Critical Models*. His reflections on the material's social dimension offer several distinct perspectives on the respective phenomena in their social mediation and glimpses of exchange society: Adorno's debate on 'Germanness' tackles intellectual socialisation, for instance; 'Free Time' broaches reification and commodification. Yet the theoretical considerations offer no answers. In response to the question 'What is German?', this is a political point. By arguing that even the putative 'fact' that there exists a German character awaiting description is dubious, Adorno turns his reply against precisely the classificatory identity thinking that raised the question. Adorno's constantly revised statements convey the dilemma that in opaque social conditions, society, and therefore single socialised phenomena too, resist complete decipherment and determination. His essays, Adorno warns, are discontinuous because reality is ruptured. Their 'insights' not only 'confirm' and 'multiply', but also relativise and 'qualify [einschränken: restrain, limit] themselves' (NLI 16). Neither facts nor theory are conclusive. The investigations must continue. This requires renewed engagement with empirical observation, whose socially limited material inevitably faces theoretical scrutiny in turn. The two poles

enter into a reciprocal relationship. Whereas Adorno's American sociology chiefly intended such reciprocity, the texts here realise it.

This can be made explicit. Gillespie (1995: 56) hears in Adorno's writing 'strong rhythmic elements', 'regular rhythmic units', parts of sentences with different 'rhythmic values'. Listening closely to the 'rhythm' of Adorno's *Critical Models* is telling in this context. Yet although 'rhythm' is a fitting term, I mean something different by it. The rhythmic elements decisive here are not parts of sentences, but two kinds of passages: those representing the empirical and those representing the theoretical dimension of Adorno's investigations. Charting the rhythm of Adorno's models suggests that he constantly shifts back and forth between those two dimensions, concluding in neither, and thus sustaining their reciprocal relation – all the while pursuing the same issue.

'What Is German?', to exemplify this, begins by unsettling the empirical suggestion that German intellectual culture is unique with reference to the hidden social conditions suffusing the observing subject. Adorno's return to the empirical dimension of his compatriots' intellectual achievements challenges that reflection. His examination of these achievements in light of their underlying social dimension is inconclusive, confirming German cultural uniqueness in one respect, denying it in two others. The investigation continues on the empirical level, where the obvious fact of German fascism undermines the theoretical denial of German uniqueness. Yet Adorno's reflections are once more inconclusive, suggesting German uniqueness from one angle, questioning it from another. With a narrower question in mind, the investigation continues, and Adorno returns to the empirical level. There he seems to observe German uniqueness, but disclosing the observation's social content unsettles it. Another empirical observation challenges the theoretical denial of German uniqueness yet again, whereas renewed reflection negates that observation. Perplexingly, and against the latter negation, renewed confrontations with the empirical reality of German intellectual life suggest its peculiarity, as do Adorno's subsequent interpretations.

Notwithstanding assurances that his essays have renounced the 'ideal' of 'indubitable certainty' (NLI 13), in Adorno's later sociological texts, theory still regularly seems to have the last word over empiry. 'What Is German?' and 'Free Time' constantly shift between the two rhythmic elements, but the empirical passages are usually short and rapid, the analytical passages long and elaborate. Significantly, though, and in contrast with Adorno's American texts, the longer reflections regularly come to an abrupt halt. Adorno leaves no doubt that the phenomena in their social mediation are not fully decoded. His theoretical perspectives on the material's social dimension often even conflict with one another, such as

in the simultaneous confirmation and denial of a socially determined German cultural uniqueness. The theoretical statements may sound conclusive in isolation. It is just that this is true of several scarcely reconcilable statements, so that the reflections end up highlighting each other's inconclusiveness. Accordingly, the investigation always continues, pursuing the same question on the empirical level. For instance, where Adorno overtly concedes the 'ambiguity' of his reflections halfway through 'What Is German?', he immediately returns to the empirical problem of 'Germanness' with his more 'modest question'. Also, in both texts the observations occasionally challenge theoretical statements, notwithstanding that the observations are, in turn, always met with theoretical scrutiny – usually with the scrutiny of analyses which are unsatisfactory and forced to re-engage with empiry. If their textual rhythm is amplified, Adorno's models illustrate the tendency in his sociological examinations of exchange society to relate the empirical and theoretical levels reciprocally.

Correspondingly, these texts display the tendency towards negation. The different theoretical perspectives challenge each other without resolution, as well as relentlessly negating every empirical observation's claim to truth. Theoretical conclusions and trustworthy facts being unavailable, the studies do not offer much by way of positive results. In the first piece, theory is as effective in negating the view that German culture is unique as it is equally in negating the view that it is not. Through the ambiguities in his writing, Adorno highlights social reality's withdrawal from identification. Similarly, theory calls into doubt both the distinction between free time and work, as well as their sameness. Adorno can only presume that if there still is a dimension of life exempted from production, it will be as good as indiscernible.

It would be myopic to pillory Adorno for failing to master these shortcomings without noting that they are consistent with his methodological arguments about the socially conditioned limitations of sociological analysis.[31] Adorno's perpetual demonstration of his failure to grasp social reality empirically and theoretically certainly raises questions about the viability of sociology *qua* examination of exchange society. Yet, partly for this reason, sociological analysis remains consequential. Not only do the investigations offer various – however problematic – perspectives on exchange society and its single phenomena, but negations also persistently expose non-identity: the incongruence between the socialised subject's factual and theoretical conceptions of social reality on the one hand and social reality itself on the other. In the rhythm of reflection of his critical

[31] For Adorno, a presentation *of* the failed world *in* the failed world will ultimately fail (see Geulen 2001: 49 50).

models one can hear the reverberations of Adorno's sociological non-identity thinking. According to Adorno, the ensuing recognition of the resistance of social reality – which mediates sociology's empirical facts, research phenomena and theoretical procedures – to sociological inquiry constitutes a methodological as well as substantive sociological insight.

Dense experience *Minima Moralia* contains an apposite description of the process of thinking that operates in the analyses explored here. Thought is not 'a discursive progression from stage to stage', but neither do 'insights fall from Heaven'. 'Rather, one cognises in a network of prejudices, intuitions, innervations, self-corrections, presuppositions, and exaggerations': they form the subject's 'dense ... experience' (MM 80). A passage in Adorno's *Sociological Writings*, referring to the reciprocity between empiry and theory in the sociological thought process, specifies: 'Solely a combination, difficult to anticipate theoretically, of fantasy and flair for the facts reaches up to the ideal of experience' (SSI 185–6).

Though none of them are satisfactory, theoretical engagements with empirical sociological data enhance the experience of exchange society by offering various perspectives on it. What is intriguing, if less obvious, is that negation generates a further dimension of the experience of society. In the studies cited, reflection relentlessly unsettles empirical material, highlighting that factual reconstructions do not trustworthily represent the reality they claim to be representing. Reflection does so by repeatedly suggesting that the material bears a social dimension which is not immediately accessible. The theoretical considerations come to no conclusions either. Society and the phenomena mediated by it are not fully accessible even to theory. This shows in the text, which constantly undergoes abrupt stops, sudden ruptures and unexpected changes in direction, rather than settling with solutions to the puzzles at issue. Adorno conveys the experience of a social whole which, albeit determining all thought and single phenomena, confronts people as an impenetrable instance. Negation generates – and, in writing, expresses[32] – the experience of estrangement, of a society that is so fossilised that it befalls individuals as intransigent essence. What Adorno once said of Benjamin in a different context applies to his own reflections here: he 'look[s] at all objects so closely, until they bec[o]me strange and as strange ones g[i]ve away their secret' (VSI 169). 'Through complete estrangement, the social relation reveals itself to be blind second nature, which is what' – here Adorno in turn adopts a Benjaminian image – 'the mythical

[32] See Chapter 5.

landscape used to be, into whose allegorical image the unattainable and unapproachable congeals' (NLI 179).

Positivist sociology, Adorno alleges, pins the fact down as 'that which is the case', without theoretically situating it in the social dynamic which conditioned it and within which it operates. The fact is severed from its 'historical implications' and 'presented as something timeless' and 'unalterable' (IS 148–9). Veblen provides a sociological counterpoint. He deciphers a range of inconspicuous cultural phenomena as manifestations of dominant social institutions, especially of the demonstration of 'power' through 'conspicuous consumption' (IS 146). Veblen allows contemporary cultural phenomena to speak of their 'prehistory', notably of the perpetuation of institutions that already characterised the barbarian age. This orientation of Veblen's work is certainly evident when *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1994b) is read alongside *The Instinct of Workmanship* (1994a).[33] It is also evident that in order to remain consistent with his criticism of positivism and remark on Veblen, Adorno cannot settle with his theoretical perspectives on capitalism's 'mythical landscape'. Indeed, Adorno's theoretical investigations never articulate surrender before their tasks. He exhibits, but does not accept as final, the discrepancies in his examinations, making ever renewed efforts to grasp the matter more adequately in social terms. Adorno's efforts display his struggle to negate the socially conditioned, sociologically instructive, but simultaneously unsatisfactory, estranged perspective of an opaque society *qua* impenetrable instance. Theoretical analysis echoes the double character of Adorno's sociology. Negation registers the petrifaction of society, but the notion that society is inherently inscrutable, natural, essential is also negated. Interpretation must persevere so as to unearth the congealed oppositions emerging from theoretical analysis as well as to dissolve what has coagulated: to decipher, in close touch with the facts, the social whole and its single phenomena as what they are, the historically changeable affair of human beings.

The texts examined in this section are only partly successful at fulfilling this analytical aim. In 'Free Time' (CM 174–5, see also IS 152–3), Adorno presents interpretations of data established by an Institute survey of people's reactions to media representations of an aristocratic wedding. Against the expectation that the culture industry 'utterly dominates' consciousness and encourages 'personalization', it was found that – in their thinking – individuals had escaped control to some extent and digressed from conventional uncritical thought patterns. This suggests the

[33] In other writings, Adorno is more critical of Veblen (P 75 94, PD 108).

possibility that humans might bring about wider social transformations.[34] But otherwise, the models in focus here, not unlike the texts cited in Chapter 1, tend to portray the individuals who maintain society as though they were compelled to do so by objective forces. Recall Adorno's discussion of sport, which trains its unsuspecting participants for the production process. In 'What Is German?', Adorno makes references to the historical genesis of the social conditions against which the question is read. Overall, however, society's historical transformability is indicated allusively, abstractly or through negating society's appearance as an invariant object. Society, Adorno reiterates in *Negative Dialectics*, has developed 'the semblance that what is is inescapable and thereby legitimated'. He insists that it is possible to 'see through' this 'total society' and show how 'threadbare' its 'apologia' actually is. But his advice on how theory might tackle this task is characteristically brief: it would require 'the physiognomics of the total condition and of the extended individual data' and 'the analysis of economic structural transformations' (ND 265). The difficulties with fulfilling one of their own objectives – with deciphering social reality more explicitly and concretely as a historical, alterable context generated and maintained by humans – are beginning to take shape as a persistent problem of Adorno's sociological analyses of exchange society.

Recalcitrant relevance

Outhwaite questions the dismissal of the concept of society as obsolete proposed by postmodern and globalisation theories. He defends a 'modest conception of society' (2006: 108). 'Society is the product of sociation, the actions of individuals in structured contexts' (2006: 95); it is 'a condition and a continuously reproduced outcome of action' involving material as well as cognitive practices. This constitutes 'a real definition of society' (2006: 91). It allows for conceptions of 'social structures and mechanisms' if 'they explain satisfactorily . . . the observable phenomena of social life' (2006: 87). One of Outhwaite's (2006: 86) sources is Adorno's concept of society. According to Outhwaite (2006: 82–3), Adorno evokes an 'imperceptible yet . . . real structure determining . . . concrete human actions' without 'depreciat[ing] . . . the individual' and emphasises 'the interpenetration of thought and reality'. By relating Adorno's concept of society to idealist and realist models, Outhwaite

[34] Cook (1996: 65 73) cites this and other passages to underline Adorno's awareness of ruptures in the culture industry's control of consciousness.

offers an original angle on Adorno's concept and its potential significance for contemporary sociology.

It might be interjected that arguments for the continuing relevance of Adorno's sociology which involve no criticisms of its most problematic components end up suggesting that his sociological work – tied, of course, to the project of investigating capitalist exchange society – would prove irrelevant if it were exposed in detail. Adorno's conception of capitalist society as a petrified structure which constrains individuals while being reproduced by them alone is scarcely modest, but mediates two extremes. Outhwaite (2006: 85) rightly states that Adorno's 'dialectical theory of society' seeks to do 'justice to . . . contradictory moments'. A conception which involves contradictions, in turn, constitutes a troublesome resource for attempts to define social reality. As I highlighted above and in Chapter 1, while Adorno theoretically investigates the social structures and mechanisms underpinning empirical phenomena, the concurrent endeavour to explain phenomena exhaustively or conclusively encounters tremendous obstacles. One of the key contributions – or challenges – of Adorno's sociology of an omnipresent yet persistently elusive capitalist whole seems to be his demonstration of the difficulties sociologists face in their struggles to define contemporary society and explain particular phenomena.

Scholars aware of the dilemmas Adorno's sociology encounters may see them as occasions for denying its contemporary significance. Critical theory, Honneth (1991: 61–2) emphasises, cannot be 'empirically controlled'. Empirical social science is treated as an 'auxiliary discipline'. Simultaneously, though, theory takes a 'negativistic turn': it is 'den[ied] . . . any claim to positive knowledge' and receives the 'function of a self-criticism of conceptual thought'. Honneth alleges that Adorno adheres to historico-philosophical theses developed in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. These theses lead him to associate all empirical and theoretical sciences with civilisation's instrumental-rational control and violent domination of inner and outer nature, and hence to oppose empirical as well as positive theoretical knowledge. One might proceed to conclude that the methodological impasses of Adorno's sociology, conditioned purely by a dogmatic insistence on disputable theorems written in the first half of the last century, prove the inability of his sociological work to speak to present debates in the discipline.

Before responding to Honneth's argument, it is worth underlining that for Adorno sociological 'theorizing' is indeed 'relatively autonomous' (Outhwaite 2006: 85) from empirical research, at least during certain analytical steps. This is doubtless part of his work's attraction for present-day opponents of empirical realism like Outhwaite (2006: 87). It is also a

potential point of disagreement between Adorno and contemporary sociologists who demand that sociologico-theoretical frameworks be empirically plausible. Urry (2000b: 21–2, 27) is careful in raising this demand for his influential 'metaphorical' framework of mobilities, networks, scapes, nodes and flows, which he proposes for a twenty-first-century 'sociology beyond societies'. Adorno assigns to theory the task of analysing sociologically decisive aspects of social reality which elude empirical observation. The criterion that sociology's theoretical frameworks be empirically plausible throughout would constrain them in tackling this task. For the more a framework claims to represent of the unobservable, the more prone it is to the charge of being empirically uncorroborated. Vis-à-vis the standard of complete empirical plausibility, theoretical analyses recede from capturing the unobservable. Accordingly Adorno's theory of exchange society, employed to interpret empirical facts with regards to what they do not represent, need not answer to facts in all its facets. 'There are sociological theorems', he replies to Popper, 'which, as insights into the mechanisms of society which operate behind the façade . . . contradict appearances to such an extent that they cannot be adequately criticized through the latter'. The theory of social integration, an analytical framework for a social tendency beyond immediate empirical grasp, 'recoil[s] from tests'. 'Nevertheless, the dependence of that which can be socially observed upon the total structure is, in reality, more valid than any findings which can be irrefutably verified in the particular and this dependence is anything but a mere figment of the imagination' (PD 112–13). In fact, the more a theoretical configuration deciphers of the material's hidden content, the more it unsettles the material's claim to represent reality. From this perspective, the demand to 'stick to the facts' would unjustifiably bind a theoretical conception to observations which are untrustworthy precisely because they cannot reveal the social context beyond observation. The more theoretical statements 'transcend the limited and immediate situation and . . . relate it to basic social conditions', to repeat Adorno's formulation, 'the more valuable they are' (CoM 103). Sociology requires empirical material as substance for reflection, but the frameworks employed to decipher it are enabled to go 'beyond the factual' (SSI 543), to penetrate the material's hidden dimensions, and to acquire perspectives on capitalist society which are unavailable to observation. Of course, nothing shields the resulting statements from further theoretical scrutiny and hence from renewed confrontations with empirical data.

Honneth's portrayal of the methodological impasses in Adorno's sociology, notably the notion that they are conditioned by Adorno's adherence to theses about science's instrumental rationality, is unduly narrow. To restate these impasses in terms of this chapter: from Adorno's

sociological viewpoint, observations and data are untrustworthy and prone to theoretical decipherment, while theoretical analysis remains incomplete, inconclusive, often even contradictory, and is thus subject to further scrutiny. As I have sought to argue, Adorno refers facts to theoretical scrutiny and theoretical assertions to further examination primarily on the basis of inquiries into obstacles which the current social conditions create for empirical and theoretical sociological research. This has implications for judging the ongoing relevance of Adorno's sociology. If one follows Honneth, contradicting Adorno's supposedly stubborn subsumption of all scientific thinking under the concept of a violent instrumental reason suffices to unsettle Adorno's critique of empirical and theoretical research and exempts contemporary social science from any further concern with it. If one follows the reading I propose, defusing Adorno's warnings issued to sociologists conducting empirical and theoretical research today would require sociologists to show that the socially generated socio-scientific problems he highlights do not exist – or to solve them.

4 The socio-critical dimension

Sociology's political dimension – its socio-critical, practical and, in recent discussions (Burawoy 2005; Calhoun 2005), public role – is a prevalent issue in contemporary social science debates. For Adorno, too, sociology's theoretical task is not exhausted by deciphering empirical material, investigating phenomena in their social mediation and examining the social whole. In his reflections on the discipline, the problems and potentials of sociology's socio-critical project are prominent themes. Moreover, these themes are interlinked with questions about sociology's involvement in social praxis and its status as a public intellectual activity.

Socio-critical sociology

Adorno rejects prohibitions upon sociological evaluations of whether social conditions are desirable and acceptable or undesirable and in need of transformation. He problematises the notion of value-freedom in Weber, positivism and administrative research. '[A]llegedly purely scientific interests', Adorno holds, are actually 'channels . . . of extra-scientific interests'. Scientific 'instruments' are 'means for answering questions which . . . originate beyond science' (PD 18). Even the instruments themselves are shaped by 'particular interests', as 'administrative[ly]' determined social research methods exemplify (PD 79). Plus 'a strictly apolitical stance' is political in that it 'becomes . . . capitulation in the face of power' (PD 59). Adorno's defence of sociological analyses of exchange society which criticise society contains a range of intricate, partly problematic arguments.

Socio-critical motifs

Adorno's social critique hinges on two motifs. Sociology issues condemnations of the unsatisfactory social condition, which allows it to advocate social change. Simultaneously, sociology must highlight the possibility of social transformation in order to counter capitulation on the part of those who alone can bring about change.

'The hellish whole' According to Adorno, sociologists must critically examine their own conceptual reconstructions of social reality, notably factual material. Such theoretical reflections, he insists, necessarily involve a critique of society. Through assessing the adequacy of sociological conceptions of society, theory also comes to evaluate society's adequacy or legitimacy. The complexity of this contention stems partly from the fact that Adorno's work paves more than one path from the critique of concepts to condemning society and urging social change.

The first path is noteworthy because Adorno's writings strongly imply but never fully explicate it. It has not received much attention in the literature. Sociology might, for instance, define exchange society as 'liberal' or 'free'. Critically assessing the adequacy of such a conception involves examining its internal inconsistencies as well as demonstrating that it conceals its own social dimension and fails to fully decipher what it intends. The concept's untrustworthiness is disclosed and the concept is unsettled. The same movement also opens society up to critique. Pointing to the social dimension of the concept under scrutiny is tantamount to highlighting that this intellectual reconstruction of reality is no figment of the subject's mind, but socially produced: that it is society's conception, and in the case of concepts of social life, society's conception of itself. Science emerges as a 'moment of' (PD 19), its 'conceptual apparatus' as 'dependent' on (PD 114), society. Exposing the concept's untrustworthiness by unveiling aspects of its hidden social dimension always means exposing the untrustworthiness of *society's* conception. The first path from theoretical reflection to social critique leads to the condemnation of society's mendacity.

This, Adorno notes, was part of the socio-critical impetus of Marx's work. Marx showed 'how little the concept which bourgeois society had of itself corresponded to the reality' (CLA 123). Society comes under attack for inflicting false consciousness upon individuals, for making false promises about itself. Adorno's peculiar assertion, that the '[c]ognitive critique . . . of theorems . . . also examines whether the objects of cognition are what they claim to be according to their own concept' (PD 23), could be read as stating that theoretical analyses of concepts also investigate whether society issues trustworthy statements about itself. By suggesting that society does not, theory condemns society for its untruthfulness. This involves a critique of society which expresses 'disgust from the world as swindle' (CLA 123).[1] The demystification of ideology may encourage the public's resistance against constantly being deceived (CM 69).

[1] Marx's 'hatred', Adorno argues, was directed 'much more against ideologues than . . . against the members of the ruling class' (PETG 116).

The somatic reverberations in the word 'disgust' – *Ekel* in the sense of repulsion excited by the loathsome or offensive – announce the second path from theoretical analysis to social critique. The second path leads to a more emphatic critique of society, occupies a more prominent place in Adorno's (especially postwar) work and yields intriguing perspectives on the role of the wretched body in his sociology.[2] This path links theoretical reflection with social critique as a condemnation of society for generating suffering.[3]

Adorno's reasoning in this context hinges on a conviction he expresses with a Nietzschean dictum: 'The corporeal moment registers to cognition that suffering should not be, that it should become different. "Woe speaks: Go"' (ND 203).[4] Experiencing suffering impels the abolition of suffering. In order to draw on this impulse of the tortured body for *social* critique, however, it will not suffice to pinpoint isolated instances of suffering and demand their abolition. The recognition of suffering must be informed by sociological examinations of exchange society. Only if sociology can suggest that *society* generates instances of suffering, can it, suffering demanding abolition, condemn society as the source of suffering and urge social change. This transition between theoretical analysis and a critique of society *qua* institution of suffering can be envisaged in at least two ways.

Sociology may think of society as 'an association of free and autonomous subjects for the sake of the possibility of a better life' (PD 25). This conceptual reconstruction of society must be scrutinised and, if it emerges as untrustworthy, unsettled. Theoretical analysis involves examining the concept as well as the individual phenomena intended by the concept in their social dimension and their mediation by the social whole. In the course of this analysis, sociology can gain critical leverage on society. Social analysis might not only suggest that exchange society contradicts the untrustworthy concept of 'association of free and autonomous individuals', but also that it does so as an institution of torment: that society is '[e]ndless terror', which 'perpetuates itself . . . through the harshness of relentless repression' (PD 26); that society is the 'hellish, coercive . . . whole, under which we all suffer' (IS 84). Similarly, sociological analysis

[2] On the body's key role in Adorno's thinking, see Geulen 2001: 52 3; Heberle 2006; Hewitt 2001; Lee 2005.

[3] Fritz Bauer, public prosecutor and driving force behind Frankfurt's Auschwitz trials during 1963 5 (Schütte 2003: 306), Adorno states, 'died of a heart attack' partly due to his 'suffer[ing]' from 'despair' over postwar Germany's socio political climate (IS 117). According to Kluge (in Schütte 2003: 314), Bauer slashed his wrists 'in the lonely bath tub' which need not undermine Adorno's point that society can generate suffering.

[4] Nietzsche (2005: 282) writes: 'Woe speaks: "Be gone! . . ." . . . all that suffers wants to live'.

might not only suggest that society contradicts the untrustworthy concept of 'for the sake of the possibility of a better life', but also that society does so as an institution threatening its members with extreme physical torture: that the 'structure . . . – Durkheim's impenetrable – is essentially negative, irreconcilable with . . . the preservation and satisfaction of humankind' (PD 27); that exchange society even has the potential to reproduce genocidal 'barbarism'. As soon as theoretical analysis suggests that society is a source of suffering, it issues a condemnation of society as an institution of suffering and urges a transformation of society in the service of abolishing suffering.

Adorno's work offers another, less obvious but more readily traceable, way of connecting sociology's theoretical reflections with a critique of society for generating suffering. Estrangement – the confrontation with the society on which one depends as a granite wall impenetrable to cognition and action; the experience of 'cold, dehumanized, rigid and alienated social relationships' (SDE 131) – belongs to those characteristics of exchange society that cause individuals constant torment (especially anxiety). Estrangement is society where it hurts: non-transparency fuels the pain inflicted upon humans by society and 'the consciousness of the rupture becomes more and more unbearable' (JA 72). 'Suffering from estrangement' is no metaphor. 'All pain and . . . negativity', regardless of their apparent distance from the body, are, Adorno holds, the 'multiply mediated, sometimes become unrecognisable form of something physical' (ND 202). Durkheim's *faits sociaux* capture the 'opacity and', literally, 'painful strangeness of the social' (SSI 240), the 'unbearable character of the estranged life' (SSI 194, see also 1999: 233). Consequently, if sociology unearths a solidified and reified society conditioning estrangement, sociology – suffering demanding abolition – simultaneously condemns society and urges social transformation. This idea echoes Horkheimer's *Traditional and Critical Theory*. Horkheimer advises that critical theory accentuate the wretched subject's experience of 'the world of capital' as 'comparable to . . . natural processes, to pure mechanisms' (1995: 207–8, see also 210). He opposes the ideology of 'real freedom in the present' because it conceals the necessity of social change and inhibits it (1995: 231).[5] The 'experience of the blindly dominating totality', as Adorno puts it, is inseparable from 'the driving yearning that it become different at last' (PD 14).

Theoretical reflection is particularly conducive to gaining critical leverage on society in this way. Adorno's theoretical analyses of conceptual

[5] Horkheimer, Adorno writes, 'aims for . . . transformation . . . without volatilising . . . the weight of the social process in which life is groaningly perpetuated' (VSI 151).

reconstructions of social phenomena unsettle these reconstructions by showing that the reconstructions' and the phenomena's social dimensions are not immediately transparent. Social analysis constantly highlights the integration of human thinking and of the phenomena it is confronted with as well as the impenetrability of the mediating social conditions. At these points in the reflexive process, sociology's theoretical analyses foment experiences of estrangement and society's underlying petrifaction. In this sense, sociological reflection is indeed always social critique – and a more vigorous critique than condemnations of society's mendacity. For by creating repeated experiences of society's solidified, objectified, estranged constitution – of the 'process of reification and autonomization' captured by Durkheim (IS 37) – sociology captures society again and again as an institution of suffering. Woe speaking: 'Go', sociology thereby repeatedly condemns society for generating painful estrangement and advocates social transformation. It is legitimate to say that among the paths Adorno's sociology paves from theoretical analysis to social critique, those leading in various ways to the recognition of society's generation of suffering lead to the most emphatic condemnations of society. Few properties of twenty-first-century capitalism promise to render appeals to overhaul society's climate of mendacity and suffering untimely.

'Possible change leaps into sight . . .' No matter through which path sociology comes to condemn society, the most adamant critique will fizzle out unless it counters capitulation on the part of those who are – alone (IS 152) – capable of social change. Social critique, Adorno holds, must create 'a state of consciousness in which one once again thinks of contributing something . . . to the world's becoming worthy of humans' (Adorno, Horkheimer *et al.* [1953] 1989b: 151). To this end, sociology must highlight the possibility of transformation: it must show that 'the coagulated social forms' are neither objective, nor invariant, but 'to be derived from human relationships' (Adorno 1961: 34) and – Adorno refers to Marx once more – a historical, transformable product (1961: 43).

This is particularly important where sociology pillories society as an estranged, apparently impenetrable, invariant wall. 'Unintelligibility does not only designate something essential in [society's] structure' – including its solidification and reification – 'but also the ideology by which [society] armours itself' (PD 15). Once people succumb to '[t]he new superstition . . . of the unconditionality and immutability of what is the case', they see no possibility to change it and 'bow to' it (VSI 329). The condemnation of the petrified society for torturous estrangement threatens to inhibit the social change that it urges. As Chapter 1 highlighted, estrangement furthers social integration.

Sociology must avoid this danger by showing that society not only demands transformation, but also holds the potential for change. This requires sociology to highlight that 'th[e] fatality ... is something social, ... the reification of all relationships between humans' (Adorno, Horkheimer *et al.* [1953] 1989b: 151), and that social institutions have developed historically (ISW 243–4). Only once it is clear that 'this condition ... has been produced by humans, ... by the context of society', will humans no longer feel 'blindly delivered up' to it (Adorno, Horkheimer *et al.* [1953] 1989b: 151). Only if sociology 'grasp[s] things which present themselves as ... naturally given in their having-become [Gewordenheit]', 'that which has become presents itself ... in such a way that ... its possible transformation ... leaps into sight' (IS 146). The 'inarticulate cry' is not Adorno's 'final response to the human condition' (Kołakowski 1978: 380). Synchronously with revealing suffering and condemning society, sociology must try to emphasise that social conditions are due to people's own blind reproduction of them. Social critique is inseparable from remembering how social phenomena have become what they are and that they could have become something different (IS 150). Thus sociology can suggest that social reality could still be turned into something different, prevent people from surrendering, and inspire resistance in those who are alone capable of social transformation. Again, Adorno agrees with Horkheimer. '[C]laim[ing] that events are absolutely necessary', Horkheimer (1995: 231) warns, culminates in 'resignation in practice'. He demands that critical theory capture the 'present ... economy and ... culture' as 'the product of human work', as humankind's 'organisation' of a specific 'epoch' and as prone to 'planful decision' (1995: 207).

Here crystallises the tension between the two socio-critical motifs in Adorno's sociology. Horkheimer (1995: 207) mentions critical theory's 'conscious contradiction'. By condemning society – particularly as an institution of suffering – sociology advocates social transformation, while sociology must highlight the possibility of transformation to prevent surrender. In one important sphere of this tension, sociology's double character makes itself felt in its socio-critical guise. By portraying the petrified condition, sociology moves beyond analysis and acquires critical leverage on society. Insisting that society is historically maintained by humans alone is also no longer only analytically significant, but a strategy for countering people's capitulation before the task of social change urged by critique.

Benjamin's 'Spes'

Adorno's socio-critical project draws inspiration from Benjamin. According to Adorno, Benjamin's critical response to capitalism sustains

a tension similar to that in his own social critique. Benjamin bears witness to a historical world made by humans which has been turned into a totality and appears natural. Conversely, Benjamin conceives everything natural as historical (NLII 225–6). Benjamin's historical writings emphatically condemn the frozen capitalist condition:

> What is that about: talking of progress to a world sinking into rigor mortis? . . . The concept of progress must be grounded in the idea of catastrophe. That it goes 'on like this' *is* the catastrophe. It is not what is impending in each case but what is given in each case . . .: hell is not something that awaits us but *this life here*. (2006: 184 5)

Humans must understand their living conditions as a permanent 'state of emergency' – a coagulated 'tradition' of oppression obstructing true progress – so as to recognise their 'task' of radical change (2006: 392). Adorno endorses Benjamin's critique of the ideology of progress (HF 145–6).[6] On his reading, Benjamin's depiction of 'second nature' critically articulates 'the reification of human relations estranged from themselves' and befalling individuals as lifeless objectivity – the 'French word for still life, *nature morte*, could be written above the portal to his philosophical dungeons' (P 233).

Adorno also underlines Benjamin's struggle against capitulating to modernity's 'estranged fate' (NLII 325). Historiography, Benjamin writes, must not 'succumb to the horror that beckons from deep in the primeval forest' (1999: N1,4). We must acknowledge our captivity as well as our '*weak* messianic power, . . . on which the past has a claim' (2006: 390). Historiography becomes a weapon by showing 'how long . . . present misery has been in preparation' *and* kindling 'a high opinion of [our] own powers' (1999: N15,3). Historiography must nourish our 'hatred' *and* our 'spirit of sacrifice'. Only thus can emerge the 'class that completes the task of liberation in the name of generations of the downtrodden' (2006: 394). Adorno regards Benjamin as partly successful at meeting this second objective. Though alerted to a seemingly natural society, Benjamin also seeks to capture society's transience: 'each of his sentences quakes with the presentiment . . . that this guilt-laden whole of modernity is foundering' (NLII 326).

Adorno seems to hear reverberations of this natural-historical tension also in Benjamin's early commentaries on Greek tragedy. This may seem puzzling, because Benjamin's idea of the 'natural-historical transformation of history' (1998: 120) draws on the allegories of baroque *Trauerspiel* (1998: 159–89; see also Buck-Morss 1991: 159–79), which, he warns

[6] See Adorno's critique of progress (CM 143 60; see also Löwy and Varikas 1995).

(1998: 100–38), must not be conflated with tragedy. Adorno neither disputes that *Trauerspiel* inspired Benjamin's 'nature–history' conception, nor questions Benjamin's distinction between *Trauerspiel* and tragedy. Still he insists that Benjamin's 'entire thinking' is 'natural-historical' (P 233) and that the 'tension' characterising Benjamin's early 'Fate and Character' – which draws on tragedy, not *Trauerspiel* – is later 'translated' into social analysis (VSI 170).[7]

'Fate and Character' depicts a mythical order of law which dictates demonic fate *qua* guilt context of the living (1996: 202–5). Adorno associates this 'fate' with society's 'natural essence' (VSI 147). According to Benjamin, the sphere of *Trauerspiel* knows natural-historically determined fate as 'entelechy of events within the field of guilt' (Benjamin 1998: 129). Yet he makes important distinctions between tragedy and *Trauerspiel* which Adorno does not discuss, e.g. tragedy confronts myth, *Trauerspiel* history (1998: 62–8); the hero's role is unique to tragedy; and the thing-world, central to *Trauerspiel*, is absent from tragedy (1998: 131–3). In turn, Benjamin's 1930s Kafka-interpretations, which Adorno imbibed (A&B 66–71), portray the non-transparent legal order of a pre-historical world ruling through fate (Benjamin 2005: 797), the organisation of 'life and work in human society' as opaque fate (2005: 803) and the 'forces' ruling 'our world' as continuation of a 'pre-historical' world of 'guilt' (2005: 807). Benjamin's 'doctrine of fate as the guilt context of the living', Adorno writes, 'turns into that of society's guilt context' (P 233). Correspondingly, Adorno's sociology employs Benjaminian concepts not only to depict, but to protest against, the torturous condition. '[M]yth' – like Durkheim's *faits sociaux* – articulates 'society as fate', its 'painful strangeness' (SSI 240). '[D]emonic semblance' characterises a 'situation' in which 'all elements' of 'social reality' are 'interlocked' and form a 'totality of reality' which 'looks like an infernal machine' operating 'above th[e] heads [of humans] ... as ... mere fatality' (Adorno, Horkheimer *et al.* [1953] 1989b: 151). And 'guilt context', too, Adorno tells his sociology undergraduates, points to the integrated 'essence' entangling all individuals (IS 21).

Adorno's reading of Benjamin also strengthens and specifies his case for complementing the call for social change with avoiding capitulation. 'Fate and Character' juxtaposes law, fate and guilt context with redemptive reconciliation. Although Adorno recognises this, he also distils from Benjamin's work the juxtaposition of fate and genius. Tragedy embodies the struggle against mythical law (Benjamin 1998: 109; Tiedemann 1973:

[7] For discussions of the following aesthetic concepts, see Benjamin 1996: 363 86; Gilloch 2002: 49 53, 73 80; Tiedemann 1973; Wolin 1982: 48 63.

97–8). 'The [tragic] hero . . . scorns to justify himself before the gods'; 'an ancient body of laws' is 'undermin[ed]' (Benjamin 1998: 115). As hero, the genius defies 'demonic fate' and 'lift[s]' his 'head . . . from the mist of guilt'. The 'human being . . . wishes to raise himself by shaking that tormented world' (1996: 203, see also 1998: 131–2). The comic hero's 'character', Benjamin (1996: 205) adds, 'gives this mystical enslavement of the person to the guilt context the answer of the genius'. He 'is the beacon in whose beams the freedom of his actions becomes visible' (1996: 206). Benjamin immediately warns that the tragic hero does not bring redemption. His argument is multifaceted. The most relevant point here emerges from his reading of Rosenzweig. The individual represented by the hero dismisses the world's laws: 'the self . . ., independent of every ethical norm, is "metaethical"'. Through 'elemental self-assertion' (Moses 1989: 231–2), the human being rises to autonomy. However, the hero, stubbornly striving for individuality, demarcates himself against others, severs his ties with God and the world, and locks himself into his abstract self. Knowing of nothing, relating to no one but himself, he falls silent (Benjamin 1996: 203; 1998: 106–10, 116–17).

For Adorno, Benjamin's tragic hero – his struggle against myth *and* his self-imprisonment – embodies two characteristics of the enlightenment subject. Adorno accepts that heroic human autonomy is situated between myth and reconciliation. Benjamin's isolated, entrapped hero represents a subject which, having objected to petrified archaic structures, has in turn adopted the self-posited human's mythical thinking. Ignorant and in denial about its own socio-material existence, the subject mistakes itself, a historical being, for the independent origin of the absolute (P 235–7). As such, it perpetuates the status quo all the more blindly. However, Adorno does underline the importance of the hero's initial demystifying moment for social criticism. His own 1932 remarks on tragedy make explicit that tragedy 'includes the subjugation of the guilty human being to the natural context' while simultaneously 'the human being raises himself up out of fate as human being . . . [T]ragic myths contain . . . subjection to guilt and nature and . . . going beyond the natural context' (INH 267, see also 1995: 74). In tragedy, Adorno maintains, 'colli[de] . . . mythical law and subjectivity', 'fateful domination and a humanity awakening to maturity'. The collision initiates 'the dissolution of the spell of fate and the birth of subjectivity' (1999: 232). In Benjamin's 'Fate and Character', Adorno adds, resonates 'the Benjaminian motif that in character the human being . . . beyond nature . . . wrests himself from the mythically amorphous' (NLII 227). Character, 'contrast[ed] to fate' in Benjamin, is the 'strong ego' (ND 237).

Adorno's efforts to salvage the opposition of the genius, as hero and character respectively, for the tension between the two motifs in his social

critique can be elucidated. On Adorno's reading, myth corresponds with the 'ever-same' society appearing as nature (NLII 148). The defiant impulse of the hero in the instant of opposing the demonic semblance of fate stands for the subject's negation of the natural semblance of petrified conditions, its dawning awareness of historical reality and possibilities. For Adorno, this momentary intervention is often the only opportunity for raising awareness of the present historical conditions. In the 'unreconciled universal', he states soberly, a 'necessity rules ... and you can count yourself lucky if you can keep your head above water long enough to recognize it and give it a name' (HF 74). This makes the subject's moment of defiance against myth, illustrated by the tragic hero, indispensable to Adorno's socio-critical efforts to prevent capitulation.

However, Adorno immediately raises a caveat consistent with his critique of the deluded enlightenment subject and with Benjamin's reading of heroic silence. Having escaped the semblance of immutable nature, the enlightened subject has come to ignore its own socio-material existence and mistakes itself for the absolute. Rosenzweig's 'tragic hero of antiquity' is a 'rigid marble statue' (in Moses 1989: 133). Adorno's subject has plunged back into the mythical misunderstanding of its own social, historical being as essential and strives to dominate the world. In the totally socialised society, Adorno argues in *Sociology and Psychology*, the subject has 'internalized' social commandments which govern it as 'second nature'. The gesture of the 'moral *Heros*', which allows the subject to proceed from the insight into the 'irrationality' of internalised commandments to 'cast[ing]' them 'aside' as though they did not affect it, is questionable (SP1 71). For Adorno, the demystifying objection represented by Benjamin's hero – the subject's negation of society's natural semblance and resistance to capitulation – is only worth salvaging if the subject simultaneously, and no less critically, engages in self-reflection. Only in reflecting also upon its *own* socio-material existence has the genius any chance of escaping the solidified, estranged world.

A deeper inquiry into these intricacies of Adorno's Benjamin-interpretation, which would further contribute to the examination of an intellectual 'relationship ... rarely ... explored in detail' (Nicholsen 1997: 11), is beyond the scope of this chapter. What makes Adorno's reading of Benjamin a useful reference for illuminating the issues discussed so far is Benjamin's influence on the socio-critical component of Adorno's sociology. As Adorno summarises the pivotal aspect of his friend's work for his own social critique, 'Benjamin's philosophy' was dominated by a tension between the doctrine of the "unreality of desperation" and that of fate fallen into nature, of the mythical "guilt context of the living"' (VSI 170). In critical response to capitalist society, Benjamin's writings, argues

Adorno, sustain this tension between condemning the fossilised condition and denying its immutability. This tension is parallel to that between urging social change and avoiding capitulation in Adorno's socio-critical endeavour. One dimension of this tension in Adorno's writings has been heard to resonate with his sociology's double character. In Benjamin's *One Way Street* (1996: 471), the tension is compressed in a fragment tinier even than the artwork it bespeaks: '*Florence, Baptistery* – On the portal Andrea de Pisano's *Spes*. Sitting, she helplessly extends her arms toward a fruit that remains beyond her reach. And yet she is winged. Nothing is truer.'

Normative standards and suffering

Adorno suggests another path from theoretical reflection to social critique.[8] It has been mapped and informs a defence of Adorno's social critique for contemporary social philosophy. Cook, who provides the clearest, most detailed considerations in this context, maps this path as follows (2001, 2004a: 112–17; 2007).[9] Reflection discloses the falsehood of concepts of social life. But concepts not only misrepresent society, they also assert society's potential future. A transformed society could be what concepts falsely claim of its present. Since Adorno assumes a transformable society, this is uncontroversial. Less uncontroversial is Cook's idea that for Adorno, certain 'emphatic' concepts, e.g. 'freedom' or 'justice', also faithfully convey what a better society would look like, i.e. unfulfilled normative standards of what society *should* be. Cook's reading echoes Adorno's assertion that 'through the achieved identity between the particular and its concept, the particular . . . would come to itself' (ND 154); for instance, 'humanity . . . must . . . achieve identity with its concept' (ND 149). To disclose discrepancies between such concepts and society is to show that society is not what the concepts rightly say it could and should be. Sociological reflections discarding misrepresentative concepts of society are thus always urged to condemn society for violating the attainable, faithfully normative, and hence binding standards of a better society raised by the concepts.

Adorno proposes this line of reasoning in several passages (e.g. PD 23–5), but others seem to undermine it. Adorno deems present conceptions of what society *is* untrustworthy. Usually, conceptions of what society *should* be like fare no better. Be they conceptual anticipations of

8 For a more elaborate discussion of the following considerations, see Benzer 2011.

9 See also Held 1980: 210 18; Jarvis 1998: 50 1, 66; Jay 1984a: 61 2; Pickford 2002: 320 7; Rose 1978: 43 6.

the right human being (ISW 228, ND 273), be they anticipations of the 'right organisation of society' (PD 122, VSI 309), 'today, all dreams of a better life [are] pale, powerless – or kitsch . . . Utopia is strictly, exclusively *only* in determinate negation. The rest is . . . Ché Guevara . . .' (Adorno in Tiedemann 1993: 110n8; see also Menke 2004: 309). Accordingly, Adorno denies the possibility to judge society against a set of 'fixed values adduced from outside' (IS 78). The assertion that concepts misrepresent society no more than society fails to fulfil concepts would hardly urge a condemnation of society, since the corresponding condemnation would amount to an unjustified critique of society for failing to fulfil misguided categorical standards which it has no reason to live up to.

Cook persuasively refines her reading on the basis of Adorno's notion that not all concepts are 'empty sound' (ND 153). Certain judgements – albeit misleading about what society is and partly misleading about what it should be – bear *some* truthful utopian elements or normative truth content faithfully indicative of what a better society would look like (Cook 2001: 7–11; see also Pickford 2002: 321–5). Adorno alerts against dismissing the truth content of the ideals of humanity, freedom and justice, for example (P 65–6). Cook (2001: 10) infers from this that 'ideology . . . provides a basis' for social critique: 'critical thinking consists in wielding the more emphatic content of concepts against . . . existing conditions' (2001: 1). If sociology, in discarding concepts as misrepresentative, manages to demonstrate that society fails to fulfil *specifically* the concept's true normative elements, it would simultaneously launch a legitimate critique of society for failing to be what the concept's faithful utopian elements rightly say it should be.

Again, many passages in Adorno's work support Cook's reading, but others render her inferences problematic. She does not deny that in emphatic normative concepts, elements of socially generated *false* notions of a better society have also sedimented (2001: 2, 8–9; 2007: 174–5). Even the ideas of humanity, freedom, justice, Adorno confirms, suffer from the society in which they are thought (P 66, see also GS4 299). He repeatedly warns that the concept of freedom also contains hidden socially conditioned notions of perpetual constraint.[10] Hence any social critique with reference to conceptual standards must isolate the concept's normative truth content from its socially generated false elements first. Otherwise, such a critique would involve an illegitimate condemnation of society with reference to misguided utopian notions or, worse, a potentially dangerous promotion of these notions as standards for social transformation.

[10] ND 216, 231 2, 246 8, 291; see also Hearfield 2004: 13 31.

Since a concept's false utopian notions are socially conditioned, and since its normative truth content is at least socially shaped in that it is produced by opposition to extant conditions,[11] purifying a concept's normative truth content from its false elements requires that the concept's social dimension be made *fully* transparent. The concept of human need, Adorno emphasises for instance, 'is a social category' (SSI 392). Canetti (1992: 125–32) puts forward the concept of a primordial need – developed and universalised in humankind's engagement with nature – to increase in numbers. This concept, alleges Adorno, misrepresents what has 'become imperative' historically as naturally necessary. The 'commandment to grow is a product of history . . . linked to the notion of . . . inheritable property' (CLA 193). 'What would be required to distinguish between true needs and false ones', he argues accordingly, 'is an insight into the structure of society as a whole' (CLA 121, see also 109; 1961: 32–3). However, as clarified earlier, intellectual constructs are currently untrustworthy precisely because, in integration and estrangement, they and the objects they seek to designate contain social dimensions which resist decryption. Note Adorno's decisive specification: even where concepts contain truth content, their 'untruth is the price for . . . the denial [Verleugnung] of the social foundation' (SSI 474). Firstly, the millionfold web mediating concepts and objects is recalcitrant against complete disentanglement. Secondly, the endeavour to make sense of the social conditions mediating concepts and objects as the human, historical context that they are is currently limited. '[E]xperiencing consciousness' faces its 'growing incapacity to understand and penetrate the complex and ideologically ever more densely veiled social reality' (NLII 62). These are the social obstacles to securely separating the concept's utopian truth content from elements merely reflecting socially misguided consciousness. Presumably alerted to the obstacles to fully disclosing the concept's social dimension, Adorno never finally distinguishes an acceptable concept of freedom from the socially generated elements designating coercion. '[F]reedom . . . is so tangled up with unfreedom, that it is not merely inhibited by [unfreedom] but has [unfreedom] as the condition of its own *concept*. This [concept] can *no more be separated out* as something absolute *than any other* individual one' (ND 262, emphases added; see also Cornell 2006: 24).

'[N]egative dialectics', Cook (2004a: 116–17) insists, 'uses normative concepts to highlight the failure of objects to correspond to them: what exists has not yet become what it ought to be. This lack of correspondence

[11] See ND 259, IS 94; Cook 2001: 2, 8 10; 2007: 173 5.

can be held against objects in a critical fashion.' Yet Adorno is not entirely consistent here: some of his considerations clearly signpost this path to social critique, but others suggest that it is obstructed. Cook and other scholars base their interpretations on the former considerations, but the predicament that Adorno's proposal for a socio-critical project drawing on normative concepts is undermined by his own sociological thought remains. Even if concepts contain elements representing truthful normative standards of what society should be, the prospects of fully deciphering a concept's social dimension so as to separate its socially conditioned false utopian elements from those truthful ones are socially limited. Hence although the recognition of the discrepancies between untrustworthy concepts and society raises awareness of society's lack of correspondence with those concepts, it does not urge a *critique* of society for not living up to them. A critique along such lines would be illegitimate, condemning society's failure to fulfil *mis*guided conceptual standards and threatening to advocate the social realisation of these misguided standards. Adorno's remarks on the potential of normative concepts to inform social critique have led scholars to highlight his work's relevance for contemporary 'Marxist' (Cook 2007: 163) opposition. His writings seem to constitute a precarious reference point for this project.

The recognition of social suffering, one might interject, is equally unable to urge a critique of society for generating suffering. Such a critique would be unjustified insofar as it would merely lament society's failure to fulfil the ideologically tainted normative conceptual standard of 'absence of suffering' and advocate the social implementation of a misleading utopian category. But there are decisive differences. Firstly, the opposition to suffering is not dependent on specific intellectual categories: 'Go' is an 'impulse, naked physical fear and the feeling of solidarity with ... torturable bodies' (ND 281); it is the human being's direct *physical* noise reaction to (spoken by) somatic woe. 'The corporeal moment' of suffering *inevitably* 'registers to cognition that suffering should not be ... That is why the specifically materialistic', the tormented body, 'converges with', i.e. simultaneously becomes, 'the critical' (ND 203). In this sense, the recognition or experience of social suffering urges a condemnation of social suffering.[12] Secondly, whenever suffering is recognised, the opposition to suffering – *qua* inextricable physical reaction to suffering – is *indisputable*. In the face of suffering, 'sentences like: there should be no torture[,] ... no concentration camps' are 'most urgent' and

[12] See Honneth 2005b: 183 7, on 'impulse' and Geuss 2005: 51 2 (cf. Zuidervaart 2007: 66 70), for a critique of Adorno's 'sensitisation against suffering'.

'[t]rue ... as impulse'; no*body* can dispute them (ND 281).[13] The 'philosopheme that one can accept or reject torture inwardly' is 'nonsense' (NLII 79). At the same time, though, 'Go' offers no concept of what society is not, but should be; it only signals what society is, but should *not* be: not a condition of suffering, torture, camps. The critique of suffering condemns society for the presence of agony and advocates its abolition. It neither condemns society for the absence of a preconceived 'humanity, freedom, justice' nor does it demand the implementation of such conceptions.[14] '[W]e cannot represent the good', Horkheimer (1985: 289) underlines his agreement with Adorno, but 'indicate what we are suffering under, what requires transformation'. Kracauer remembers disagreeing with Adorno on exactly the same issue:

> I told him, Utopian thought makes sense only if it assumes the form of a vision ... with a definite content ... He says ... that the concept of Utopia ... vanishes if you want to spell it out ... (A&K 514)

> I told him: You curse [bourgeois society], reject Communism, frown down on ... Social Democracy ... what do you suggest should be done ...? His (pitiable) answer was: I know and say, what is bad; is this not enough? (A&K 517)

It is because the opposition to existing torment and the demand for its eradication avoid the problems besetting the critique of society for violating ostensibly normative concepts that the critique of social suffering is so important to the socio-critical dimension of Adorno's sociology.

This elucidates some of the rare, elusive hints at the 'right' conditions that Adorno does offer. Since the right life must not suffer, many of these hints specifically invoke conditions for abolishing suffering.[15] For instance, since the absence of painful estrangement requires a non-estranged state, Adorno

[13] Here, Adorno hears the echo of the human 'species', which directs '[a]ll activities' however much they fail to reach its aim towards 'its physical continued existence' and 'against suffering'. To the species, the species' suffering is unacceptable, so that 'the negation of physical suffering of even the least of its members ... is in the interest of all' (ND 203).

[14] According to Müller Doohm (2004: 289), Adorno's 'critique does not ... depend on a point of view', but 'on the insight that social relations must be altered because they produce suffering, injustice, and coercion'. Indeed, coercion *creates* suffering (IS 84, ND 222). Adorno criticises 'coercion' because *suffering* demands abolition. One must criticise 'domination', Adorno writes, not due to 'the childhood dream of a blessed state under palm trees', but because domination has a 'tendency' to become total as fascism's 'absolute horror' (SSI 586).

[15] Borrowing Freud's (1991: 47) term *Lebensnot*, 'exigencies of life' with which Freud specifies his thesis that 'civilization has been created ... at the cost of satisfaction of the instincts' Adorno highlights that capitalist relations of production still create unneces sary shortage and denial for their members (IS 111). For instance, despite the possibility of abolishing hunger by means of extant productive forces, people go hungry due to society's organisation of production (CM 144, HM 144, PD 62). '[R]ight consciousness',

accepts the demand for a life unthreatened in 'nearness' with the 'different' (ND 192) – 'the harmony of the autonomous subject with the necessary conditions of social and systematic integration', as Müller-Doohm (2004: 290) phrases it sociologically. More generally, Adorno argues (again under Horkheimer's strong influence[16]), since the absence of physical pain requires corporeal satisfaction, 'sensual happiness' is the 'condition for a right life' (NLII 48). Materialism yearns for 'the resurrection of the flesh . . ., the liberation of the intellect from the primacy of material needs in the state of their fulfilment' (ND 207). Only a society which has replaced 'process, doing, fulfilling' with 'lying on water and looking peacefully at the sky' because in it 'no-one . . . go[es] hungry any more' and it 'no longer knows want' could ever be 'true' (MM 156–7). Yet I hasten to add that assessing the susceptibility of these hints to the critique of normative concepts sketched above would be necessary for specifying the problems and potentials of Adorno's socio-critical sociology further.

Socio-critical interventions

A sociological analysis of social life serves Adorno's social critique if it develops a tension between two motifs: condemning society – urging transformation – and highlighting the possibility of social change – against capitulation. Adorno's late sociology, especially *Critical Models*, contains numerous texts that meet these criteria in direct confrontation with concrete social problems. 'Sexual Taboos and Law Today' from 1963, which analyses sexual practices, taboos and the sexual offences legislation, illustrates Adorno's socio-critical project.

Bungled liberation The most conspicuous 'fact' about sex in the 1960s, Adorno holds, is its being accepted. The 'incessantly' provocative mass media, the indispensability of 'a healthy sex life' to one's 'physical and psychic hygiene', the 'anachronistic' ring of even mentioning 'taboos' when so many girls now have boyfriends: all this suggests that society embraces an unrepressed 'fun morality'[17] of pleasure and entertainment

and thus right life, demand the abolition of *Lebensnot* (ND 390), which is possible today (SSI 585). Yet decades after Adorno's death, 'millions' are still 'starv[ing] whilst food is stockpiled or deliberately destroyed' (Jarvis 1998: 60).

[16] Adorno and Horkheimer's (A&H1 112, 126, 265, 406) correspondences on Parisian red light adventures express Adorno's agreement with Horkheimer's theoretical disavowal of bourgeois morality (VSI 150, 157 8). Horkheimer (1992: 43 122) criticises bourgeois morals for condemning, in the minority's interest, the masses' pursuit of contentment and demands a transformation of society for the sake of human enjoyment.

[17] Adorno adopts this term from sociologists Wolfenstein and Leites (1950: 21): 'If you are not having fun, you must ask yourself what is wrong with you.' The conflict between the

and that sexual emancipation has taken place. Naturally, Adorno refuses to take factual representations at face value. The general acceptance and apparent liberation of sex demand scrutiny in relation to the social whole (CM 72).[18]

This conceptual reconstruction of sex in social life hides two aspects. Firstly, although general tolerance superficially indicates sexual liberation, on a deeper level, acceptance signals the social *integration* of sex. Just like 'bourgeois society overcame the proletarian threat by incorporating the proletariat', sex is accepted because it has been made acceptable. Sex is socially 'absorbed, institutionalized, and administered', 'turned on and off, channelled and exploited in countless forms by the material and cultural industry'. As 'monopolistically controlled and standardized' sexual enterprise, sex has been decontaminated: 'bridled, it is tolerated'. Secondly, acceptance is only seemingly universal. Many practices are still scandalised and socially *repressed*: 'Whereas sexuality has been integrated, that which cannot be integrated, the actually sexual aroma, continues to be detested by society' (CM 72–3).

The ideology of the cosmetics and psychotherapeutic industries suggests that sex is tolerated strictly as narrow genitality purified of alleged perversion. Greater acceptance of sex thus merely suggests that sex is increasingly forced into this social model, where it is even commercially viable.[19] Adorno refers to Freud's differentiation between partial or component instincts, typical of infantile sexuality, and the primacy of genitality in adulthood. Freud (1974: 32–5, 57–65, 73–8) associates component instincts with a range of erotogenic zones and sexual aims. Only in puberty are they aligned with genitality and procreation. Today, Adorno argues, this constricted form of sex is taken for its only natural, agreeable manifestation (CM 74–5). As inarticulate sexual mores and passages in the sexual offences legislation reveal, alternative forms of sexuality and their representatives are identified as perverse and repressed with the aim of exorcism. Society's widespread hatred for these representatives is expressed variously: in the constant raids and closures of brothels; in interventions against the consumption of pornography; in

requirement to have fun and Western culture's 'goodness morality' is contained by the 'good bad girl' in American films. The heroine conveys the 'sexual impulse' of attractive ness, but eventually becomes the girl one could marry.

[18] Freud, Adorno emphasises, defines the 'specifically sexual' as the *socially* indecent (CM 73).

[19] Adorno began to examine integrated sexuality closely in the mid 1950s. Initially, he argued that promiscuity followed the exchange and profit principle: 'sex ... is being assimilated to the exchange relation, the rationality of give and take' (VSI 304). In the *Brave New World*, pleasure has 'degenerate[d] to miserable fun and to an occasion for the narcissistic satisfaction of having "had" this or that one' (P 103).

the infamous 'homosexuals' paragraph', rigidified by the Nazis and effective in West Germany until 1969; in the taboo on the sexuality of minors; and in the emphasis – exaggerated, given the threat of nuclear warfare – on the need to protect the individual's sexuality legally against putative aberrations (CM 77–82). 'The sexus is decontaminated as sex, quasi a kind of sport; whatever is different about it still causes allergic reactions' (CM 73). The popular conception that capitalism accepts sex and has witnessed sexual liberation conceals both aspects of the matter.

Social suffering 'Sexual Taboos' pursues several of the aforementioned paths from theoretical reflections on untrustworthy conceptions of social reality to its critique and the advocacy of its transformation. One passage reads as follows: The 'guardians of . . . order' say humans 'have their freedom . . . There is no other response to this than that sexual liberation in contemporary society is mere illusion' (CM 72). Where reflection criticises society's self-portrayal as a sexually emancipated order for its untrustworthiness, it also condemns society for mendaciously misrepresenting itself.

Much of 'Sexual Taboos' seems to follow the socio-critical path from theoretical analysis to a condemnation of society for conditioning suffering. Adorno rejects the claim that society is sexually liberated, arguing that sex is either integrated or repressed by society's rigidified taboos. Crucially, integration and repression occasion suffering, which demands abolition. Adorno's analyses are unassailably socio-critical, elaborately condemning society's integrative and repressive dispositions. Adorno pillories social integration, because purely genital sexuality – the model accepted by the SS as much as by the 'libertinage of beaches and camp sites nowadays' – constitutes no source of happiness (nor would a sexuality governed by partial instincts be such a source) (CM 74–5).[20] Social repression is condemned, because the 'vengeance exacted on what . . . is . . . judged to be [indecent]' is reminiscent of the 'witch trials' (CM 76): prostitutes are persecuted similarly to the Jews; the fact that '[m]urders of prostitutes', unlike 'crimes against property', 'go unpunished' shows that 'society's power . . . wishes death' to those it regards as perverted (CM 78–9); 'persistent legal discrimination' and 'social ostracism' put homosexuals under 'permanent pressure of anxiety', resulting in the

[20] 'All happiness is aroused by the tension between [partial libido and genitality].' This leads Adorno to sketch the loss of self as 'a . . . bit of sexual utopia' (CM 75). It is difficult to estimate how determinedly he sought to outline a concept of sexual utopia and judge society against it. In 1968, he noted that today's conceptions of 'erotic utopia' were as 'pale' and 'powerless' as other positive notions of the 'better life' (in Tiedemann 1993: 110n8; see also Huyssen 2002: 35).

fettering and 'destruction of [their] intellectual powers' (CM 80); and censorship of pornography obstructs enjoyment (CM 81).[21] Conversely, Adorno adds, the law and public morality make suffering possible due to their lenience towards 'sadistic violence': 'prohibited tenderness towards minors', for instance, 'is consistently punished more harshly than when . . . children are beaten half to death by parents or teachers'; while Germany's tolerance of fast, reckless driving combines 'the urge to get ahead in the nonmetaphorical sense, the incarnation of a healthy will to succeed', with 'contempt for human life' (CM 82–3). Like 'Go', 'No integration! No repression!' is partly an outcry in 'solidarity with the victims' (CM 73), a response to the physical pain generated by society. However, like 'No torture! No concentration camps!', 'No integration! No repression!' says little about what should be, but emphatically what should *not* be, primarily holding against society the present agony that should be avoided, rather than its failure to realise a preconceived standard of sexual liberation. Through suggesting that society creates suffering, Adorno's investigation of sexual taboos culminates in a critique which strongly urges social transformation. Progress, he insists, is inseparable from 'easing . . . suffering' (CM 154).

Adorno's critique targets the prevalent conditions also for incubating the 'rage' that makes people receptive to taboos. Capitalism's 'formal freedom' burdens individuals with the 'responsibility of autonomy', while they remain dependent on solidified, 'overpowering institutions'. As a result, people feel 'overtaxed and threatened'. This threat 'contain[s]' the 'threat of castration'; 'social suffering' is 'displaced onto sexuality'; and 'sexuality becomes a social nerve centre' (CM 77). Society is not only condemned for inflicting suffering on those who are denied, or who are representative of, rogue instincts but also for inflicting suffering on the repressors – particularly as it is their suffering which turns them into willing executers of repressive violence against others.

Continuing 'repression', finally, 'may . . . feed into the reservoir of authoritarian personalities' and foster a social climate conducive to repetitions of the unspeakable suffering of the past. *The Authoritarian Personality*, Adorno highlights, found that subjects with the 'character structure' of potential followers of fascism projected 'wild sexual notions they rejected in themselves . . . onto other groups' and harboured 'persecution fantasies against those whom they considered to be sexual deviants'. 'The German sexual taboos fall within the same ideological and

[21] Franks (2006: 193 213) proposes a critical reading of pornography based on Adorno's work. See Rycenga (2002: 361 78) on Adorno's own alleged adherence to questionable sexual stereotypes.

psychological syndrome of prejudice that helped National Socialism build its mass support' (CM 73).

Condemning social suffering and advocating transformation does not exhaust sociology's socio-critical task. Especially where society appears overpowering and invariant, social critique must synchronously counter the capitulation of those who are alone capable of social change by highlighting its possibility. This theoretical tension is characteristic of Adorno's socio-critical project. Adorno disputes the invariability of social taboos arguing that whereas 'traditional sexual taboos attacked both genitality and the partial drives', contemporary capitalism witnesses 'the increasing social reinforcement of genitality' and growing 'pressure ... against the partial drives and ... their representatives' (CM 75). Adorno also suggests that humans can intervene in the repressive climate through informed legal reforms (CM 81–3).[22] His humble-sounding, keyword-like proposal aims to incite a wider negation of all social norms surrounding sexuality that appear naturally justified and true: 'A reform of penal law worthy of the name ... would emancipate itself from the spirit of the *Volk*, from those *faits sociaux* Durkheim had already wanted to recognise by the fact that they hurt' (CM 83).

But, together with sociology's double character in its socio-critical dimension, the aforementioned quandaries also resurface. Politics, taboos and the law, Adorno states, inhabit the 'superstructure' (CM 71) of the underlying social conditions which perpetuate suffering and repression. Of course, Adorno problematises the superstructure-infrastructure relationship partly because the superstructure is a vital organ of social reproduction and a potential organ of change (PETG 67–8, IS 152). Suggesting the transformability of thought patterns is therefore tantamount to suggesting the possibility of social transformation from an important angle. However, the decisive intellectual support of exchange society is thinking in line with the identity and exchange principles. A presentation of the transformability of legal and moral thought without a lucid indication of the negotiability of those reified intellectual principles amounts to a narrow portrayal of the potential for humans to change society. Furthermore, since thinking according to those principles does not exhaust society's maintenance, even a comprehensive indication of the transformability of thought patterns would only be partly successful at

[22] Punitive laws, Adorno holds, are inadequate insofar as socially governed individuals cannot be treated as free agents. Yet defenders of preventive laws, arguing that human actions are predetermined, seldom know about psychological determinants, let alone about society as the decisive determinant, which could be transformed so that individuals are no longer predetermined. Juridical experts should pay closer attention to psycholog ical and sociological research into determinants (CM 83 6).

highlighting that society, governed by social relations of production, could be changed by humans. Hence Adorno's essay can only be partly successful at countering capitulation in the face of social suffering.

Nevertheless, Adorno's postwar work clearly represents his political ambitions and his confrontations with social ills of his time.[23] 'Sexual Taboos', understood by its author as an 'intervention' (A&H4 696), largely fulfils his criteria of social critique and illustrates his socio-critical endeavour in direct engagement with a political issue. The essay is exemplary of Adorno's sociological texts of the 1950s and 60s, particularly of *Critical Models*.[24] Adorno, who at one point seems to have contemplated 'Cultural-Political Essays' as a subtitle for *Interventions* (Adorno *et al.* 2003: 436n1) and draws attention to the 'polemic[al]' undertones of the title *Catchwords* (*Stichworte*) (CM 126), appears justified in insisting that his critical models not only analyse but intervene in the reified consciousness that helps sustain capitalist society (CM 4).

Praxis in the time of theory

One might reasonably assume that in making such an emphatic case for social change and against capitulation, Adorno would endorse social praxis – organised collective activities aiming to overturn exchange society. Yet although praxis constitutes an important topic in his sociological thinking, the matter is delicate. Adorno's sociology of exchange society prevents him from supporting collective actions. Though honouring the need for change, 'this', Adorno declares, 'is the time of theory' (MCP 126). Nonetheless, one must not rush to the conclusion that Adorno's socio-critical project is forced into the 'dead end' of pure contemplation (Buck-Morss 1977: 190). Adorno's view of the Holocaust intensified his opposition to the 1960s student movement's collective radicalism, but it also made him back specific political interventions in the postwar decades. In reaction to the Holocaust, Adorno even dedicated parts of his sociology to outlining a programme for combating 'barbarism'.

Pseudo-activity as social reproduction

In a 1966 interview, Adorno confessed an 'increasing aversion to praxis, in contradiction to my own theoretical positions' (VSII 738). His rejection of attempts to organise collective, radically transformative action is certainly

[23] Adorno has been criticised for dodging such confrontations (Jay 1984a: 86; Kellner 1989: 209 10; Lukács 1971b: 22; Offe 2005: 76; Tar 1977: 161 2).

[24] Other issues include anti Semitism, education and the culture industry.

at odds with his socio-critical emphasis on the necessity and possibility of social change. Yet other sociological considerations raise coherent concerns about social praxis generally and 1960s student activism specifically. In contemporary capitalism, Adorno argues, collectively organised political projects tend to atrophy as ineffectual 'pseudo-activity' (CM 269). Pseudo-praxis designates the 'channelling of energies' into 'meaningless activity with the guileful signs of seriousness and significance' (P 80–1).[25] In the totally socialised world, society regulates everything one could act upon. The object's 'need' is socially determined (CM 265). The social process conditions the possibilities and requirements for transformative action. Hence 'meaningful praxis' (SSI 579), sufficiently informed about what must be done for an intervention to bring about social change, depends on a sociological understanding of society and its historical tendency (IS 27, 149–50). Currently, however, social reality, and therefore the direction that transformative action must take, is not immediately understandable. In frozen conditions 'that are not starting to thaw', 'true politics' is obstructed (NLII 93). The disappointed 1968 French revolts and their 'barricades' against 'those who administer the bomb' illustrate contemporary activism's misled, inconsequential, even 'ridiculous' operations (CM 269, see also VSI 399; 2002c: 17). The object's need, 'mediated' by the 'total system', is only theoretically determinable. An 'impatien[t]' praxis seeking to change an uninterpreted world is 'wea[k]' and 'fail[s]' (CM 265).

Ineffectual praxis disturbs Adorno particularly because it serves the reproduction of the status quo. The socialised society regulates all living activity, 'prescribes and limits the conditions of any individual's action' (CM 264). Political existentialism underestimates this problem. Sartre insists on everybody's capacity and responsibility to choose his own actions: 'the coward makes himself cowardly' and 'always' has the 'possibility . . . to give up cowardice' (1973: 43). For Sartre, Adorno counters, 'social relations and conditions' are thus 'at best a timely addition' but 'structurally . . . hardly more than occasions for action'. In reality, integration encroaches on life intensely enough to render free decision illusory (ND 59–60). Even putatively radical activists – 'virtuosos . . . of formal procedures' (CM 270), demanding of every idea positive practical advice (CM 288) and stubbornly active (CM 290) – neatly conform to the schematism and productionism serving capitalism. Aligned with 'reified consciousness', they prioritise means over ends and treat their opponents in discussions as mere instruments for executing their plans, as things (CM 268–9). Crucially, as blind

[25] DIY, too, is pseudo activity: spontaneity driven by the desire to change the petrified conditions but misdirected (CM 173, see also CoM 99 100).

pseudo-activity, activism has no transformative impact: the conformist reproduction of its determining conditions is its *sole* effect. Pseudo-praxis, 'truly ... adapted ... to the ... *huis clos*',[26] simply 'reproduces [the administered] world in itself' (CM 269–70).

'[I]f today one behaved as if one could change the world tomorrow', Adorno repeats, 'then one would be a liar' (PD 129). Pseudo-activity serves the status quo also by living this lie. Feigning control over reality, pseudo-praxis pretends to bridge the abyss between subjects and the 'thoroughly mediated and rigidified society'. Insofar as the painful awareness of estrangement in the petrified order compels social transformation, pseudo-praxis undermines a vital argument for change – for praxis. '[S]uffering caused ... by obstructed reality', Adorno remarks in response to his student critics, 'becomes rage ... at him who expresses it'. But by ignoring the message and pursuing an ineffective pseudo-activity, activists fake their immunity to captivity, cling to a 'pseudo-reality' (CM 291) and immobilise their socio-critical consciousness of the present. In 'situations ... solidified' to the point of barring informed praxis, theory may well be limited to rendering one 'a bit more uncomfortable ... because one sees how all exits are blocked up' (PETG 132). Yet only discomfort makes the very necessity of transformation evident.

Those 'trust[ing] ... the limited action of small groups', Adorno concedes, remember that the 'society that impenetrably confronts people is nonetheless these very people'. They recall the 'spontaneity ... without which this whole cannot become ... different' (CM 291–2). However, he is unable to ignore his sociological concerns over attempts to organise collective radical action. In the 'desperate' situation, where 'the praxis on which everything depends is thwarted', critical social analysis seems to be the only viable – and an indispensable – project (ND 243). Only a sociology which interprets society, the 'universal block around and within humans' (S 153), and decrypts the need of what requires change can expose ruptures susceptible to transformation within society and make praxis effective. Only theory can help praxis escape socially subservient, situation-bound acting (CM 264–6, 291) and create the socio-critical awareness clouded by naïve activism. 'The undiminished persistence of suffering, fear, and menace urges ... thought ... not to throw itself away ... [I]t would have to recognise, without pacification, why the world, which could be paradise here and now, can become hell tomorrow ... It would be anachronistic to abolish [such cognition] for the sake of a praxis that at this historical hour would inevitably eternalize ... the status-quo' (CM 14).

[26] *Huis clos*, the original title of Sartre's 1944 (2001) play *No Exit*, means 'closed door'.

Imperative interventions

'Hitler has forced a new categorical imperative upon humans in the state of their unfreedom: to arrange their thinking and acting so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself, that nothing similar will happen.' Though more eloquent, Adorno's formulation strongly resonates with 'Go', amplifying the wretched body's impact on his socio-critical thinking: the imperative contains the individual's 'abhorrence ... of the unbearable physical pain inflicted upon individuals'; no*body* can dispute it (the sheer attempt to ground it would be outrageous); and, unlike Kant's categorical imperative,[27] Adorno's maxim is negative, dictating one to act exclusively so that the agony is *not* repeated (ND 358). Adorno's principle is discussed elsewhere.[28] Here it is useful to bring it to bear upon the issue of praxis.

It was this non-negotiable imperative that prevented Adorno's blanket retreat into contemplation and led him to support several specific interventions in the postwar era. From the 1950s onwards, he engaged, albeit never uncritically, with the students' call for university reforms (IS 5, VSI 332–8, 2002c: 17). In the mid-1960s, he expressed solidarity with the antiwar faction, since reports from Vietnam indicated the continuation of the 'world of torture ... after Auschwitz' (MCP 101). In 1967, Adorno condemned the events surrounding the killing of a protester at a Berlin rally during the Persian Shah's state visit and promptly subscribed to the students' demands for a rigorous, open investigation. The trigger-happy police officer's acquittal and lack of remorse, Adorno warned, showed that the victim, like the Jews under National Socialism, was treated as the de-individualised example of a student species (1994: 145–7; Berman 2002: 126–9). Adorno also protested – in writing (VSI 396–7, see also Adorno *et al.* 2003: 633–4) and at demonstrations (Schütte 2003: 320–8) – against legislation permitting governmental restrictions on basic rights in 'states of emergency'. The bill, passed in 1968, reminded him of an article in the Weimar constitution serving the Nazis. Finally, Adorno publicly denounced the 1968 invasion of the ČSSR (Adorno *et al.* 2003: 647–50), having long backed some of his students' opposition to Soviet communism (see Krahl 1974: 165–6) and maintained that the Russian tyranny was irreconcilable with Marxist social critique (VSI 390–3; Adorno *et al.* 2003: 238).[29]

[27] 'Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in any other person, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means' (2002: 230, in italic in the original).

[28] See Bernstein 2001: 384 96; Lee 2005: 136 40; Pritchard 2004: 201 5; Schweppenhäuser 2004: 344 7; Zuidervaart 2007: 60 1, 179 80.

[29] China's Cultural Revolution, too, filled Adorno with 'horror' (Adorno and Sohn Rethel 1991: 152).

These occasions unsettle 'the stereotypical view of Adorno as indifferent to the political struggles of the day' (Hammer 2006: 21; see also Berman 2002: 129–31). Moreover, although Adorno was always more or less distrustful of the demand for small transformations *within* the capitalist system (IS 26–7, S 153, 2002c: 15) – of what Popper (1944: 122) calls 'piecemeal social engineering' – his theoretical thinking justifies his endorsement of these political interventions. Adorno backed activities which he saw as directed specifically against developments foreshadowing a potential renewal of totalitarianism and its cruelties. His support was consistent with his unbending imperative, imposed by Auschwitz, to act so that nothing like it would recur.

Herbert Marcuse, Adorno's former colleague at the Institute, ascribed an important political role to student radicalism (1969a: 49–78; 1970: 83–108). Opposing the ideology of universal tolerance, he advocated *in*tolerance and partisanship not only against overt tyranny, but against the entire 'tyranny of public opinion' (1969b: 120) and practices biased towards perpetuating the oppressive capitalist condition. Marcuse thought resistance partly achievable by 'intellectual subversion' (1969b: 126). Yet if 'legal means' failed, oppressed minorities and critics had the right to militancy (1969b: 130, 137). 'If they use violence, they do not start a new chain of violence but try to break an established one. Since they will be punished, they know the risk, and when they are willing to take it, no third person, ... least of all the educator ..., has the right to preach them abstention' (1969b: 131).

Adorno never supported his students' activities beyond the interventions mentioned. He even intensified his disapproval of their organised actions. Adding to his concerns over praxis outlined above, his analysis of the radical movement suggested that it was developing proto-fascist tendencies. Above all, Adorno noted, students were becoming increasingly violent,[30] to which he responded unambiguously: 'I would have to disavow my whole life – the experiences under Hitler and what I have observed of Stalinism – if I did not disobey the eternal circle of ... violence against violence ... I refuse my allegiance to anyone who, after the murder of uncounted millions of humans ..., still preaches violence' (2002c: 17–18).[31] Violent praxis,

[30] Adorno drew material from many personal encounters (Adorno and Sohn Rethel 1991: 157; Adorno *et al.* 2003: 686; Müller Doohm 2009: 448 65; Schütte 2003: 333 42; Tiedemann 1994: 25 6). A particularly 'drastic' (CM 126) clash, known as the 'bared breast incident', has inspired biographical (Jäger 2004: 207 8; Müller Doohm 2009: 475) and theoretical debates (Hammer 2006: 23 5; Lee 2006: 113 39; Lenk 2003; Rycenga 2002: 373).

[31] Adorno's characterisation of his discrepancies with Marcuse as temperamental (VSII 768) was a blatant understatement. His attack on the 'repressive intolerance to thought' (CM 290) was a dig at Marcuse, and when Beckett (in Tiedemann 1994: 26), writing to Adorno, renamed the student movement *Marcusejugend*, Adorno did not seem to protest.

Adorno warned, was particularly dangerous because without any insight into the conditions determining its direction, it remained misguided. The radicals merely reacted without reflecting or examining the social situation and therefore acted wrongly (CM 291). By disrupting lectures students even contradicted their own democratically motivated demand for free expression (IS 154). Activists were 'aggressiv[e]' and lacked 'introspection' (CM 271). They were organised in groups, followed 'standardized slogans . . . distributed by leaders [Führer]' and demanded personal 'sacrifice', which Adorno likened to the 'fascist repertoire' (CM 275–6). The individual was strictly subordinated to the collective. 'When a student's room was smashed because he preferred to work rather than join in actions, on his wall was scrawled: whoever occupies himself with theory, without acting practically, is a traitor to socialism . . . The concept of the traitor comes from the eternal stock of collective repression, whatever its coloration' (CM 263).

Adorno reinforced his critique of the students' collective radicalism with specific reference to what he saw as its politically perilous undercurrent. To him, endorsing their collective activities would have meant violating the non-negotiable dictate imposed by the Holocaust to act and think so that Auschwitz would never be repeated. The same new imperative that made him back selected activities also inspired his growing opposition to organised activism. The students had established a dangerous, 'hardly Kantian categorical imperative . . .: you must sign' (CM 292). Adorno had to refuse.

Sociology contra barbarism

To an interview question about what can be done to change society, Adorno responded: 'you've got me stumped . . . I don't know . . . I can only try to recklessly analyse what is' (2002c: 16). Yet the relationship between his sociology and political action is richer than his critique of collective praxis or his sporadic support for specific interventions during the 1950s–60s would suggest. Compelled by his new categorical imperative, Adorno dedicated parts of his postwar sociology to fighting barbarism. His sociological work contains strategic references for, and outlines of, a political programme of action – significantly more ambitious than the aforementioned interventions – to combat the recurrence of genocide. Sociology also assumes a public role in implementing this programme.[32]

[32] On Adorno's proposals, see also Hohendahl 1995: 45 72.

Sociologically imperative 'One speaks of the threat of a relapse into barbarism. But ... Auschwitz *was* it' (CM 191). Adorno had been fearing a genocide in Germany since 1938 (A&H2 29), knew of it by the early 1940s (2006c: 131), and from then on let the 'moral obligation' – foreshadowing his categorical imperative – to examine and combat anti-Semitism guide his work (A&H2 68–9, see also 84). Although he had emigrated in 1934, after losing his teaching permission and having had confrontations with the Gestapo (Müller-Doohm 2009: 173–86), personal contacts kept him aware of the German 'hell'. Soon Adorno and Horkheimer learnt about the persecution of Institute affiliates, some of whom survived and related their experiences in exile (A&H1 34, 85–8; see also Jäger 2004: 130; Jay 1996: 170). '[A] direct cousin of my father's ...', Adorno reported in 1938, 'was taken to Dachau without a statement of reasons ... [A]fter a few weeks, his wife received the laconic news of his incineration' (A&H2 38). Further timely contacts with the regime were reported by Adorno's Austrian acquaintances, many of whom emigrated only after 1938, including his friend Soma Morgenstern (Adorno 2006c: 73–4) and child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim. Bettelheim had been deported to Germany and held subsequently at Dachau and Buchenwald (Wiggershaus 1994: 379). Adorno also closely observed his parents' fate, who, interned and tormented in 1939 (2006c: 1–4), escaped at the last minute. After the war, especially upon reading sociologist and former Buchenwald inmate Eugen Kogon's (1946: viii) account of the concentration camp system, which explicitly demands 'Never and Nowhere again!', Adorno realised the extent of the Nazi horror (MCP 109, 125). He became convinced that, in dark correspondence with the twentieth century's massive development of 'productive forces', the Holocaust's 'mass-production and cost-cutting of death', which had implemented those forces to 'burst the lungs of millions ... with gas', had surpassed the scale and intensity of cruelties committed in earlier epochs (MM 233–4; see also Kogon 1946: 132). Auschwitz was no 'industrial accident on the course of economic-technological progress' (VSI 141). The Nazi terror had brought about the 'end of the world' (Adorno and Berg 2005: 239). '[T]he pitiable consolation that it could still get worse' (CM 268) had lost all persuasiveness.

This did not mean that the horror could not recur. Like Horkheimer and Marcuse (see Marcuse 1969b: 113), Adorno welcomed Western democracy's freedom of critique – inconceivable under prior fascism and current communism (VSI 392–3).[33] But this alleviated neither his,

[33] So much so that in 1958 Adorno barred Sohn Rethel from lecturing in Frankfurt because he also lectured in the GDR. Adorno also condemned Bloch, professor in Leipzig, as 'Stalinis[t]', and 'lamblike' vis à vis the East German regime (Adorno and Sohn Rethel

nor Horkheimer's, nor Marcuse's (1970: 93) worries over the potential for renewed barbarism. During the 1950s–60s, Adorno repeatedly accentuated that the 'migration of peoples . . . into Auschwitz' could 'continue' (JA 34, see also ISW 234), because the conditions which had hatched it were still in place (CM 89–90, 98–9, PD 120).[34] *Group Experiment*, reporting defensive-apologetic responses and elements of national socialist attitudes among respondents (GEX 376–97), must have fuelled these concerns. Occasionally, Adorno was alarmed enough to readmit – albeit in no comforting fashion – the comparative banned above: 'at any moment', it 'can happen again and get even worse' (1998c: 280).

Contrary to Popper's (1944: 120) 'technological approach to social science', Adorno usually shielded his analyses from demands for practical implications (see CM 277). Yet the continuing threat of barbarism in the postwar years forced Adorno to make an exception. Working out a programme for actively combating the recurrence of the worst became an important preoccupation of his sociology. As its seldom-cited sociological translation makes plain, Adorno was once more compelled by his new categorical imperative:

> [A]fter Auschwitz, and Auschwitz was therein prototypical of something . . . repeated incessantly in the world . . ., the interest that this does not happen again or that, where . . . and when it happens, it is stopped . . . ought to determine the choice of means of cognition and . . . problems . . . [S]imply by virtue of the dimen sion of horror attached to it, [Auschwitz] has such gravity . . . that . . . the pragmatism is justified which demands . . . to prioritise a cognition . . . that aims to prevent such events. (IS 18)

Sociology of barbarism Adorno seeks to assist the fight against the recurrence of barbarism by providing a strategic reference point in the form of a sociological analysis of its preconditions. On the empirical level, Adorno focuses on the intellectual prerequisites and possible supports of genocide. The 'social-psychological disposition' which presently does not develop 'its full efficacy', but 'could regain unimagined power' in different circumstances (GEX 280), had already been tackled by *The Authoritarian Personality* and *Group Experiment*. Adorno's later writings, clearly informed

1991: 114 21; Adorno *et al.* 2003: 297 8). Adorno and Horkheimer had distanced themselves from Bloch in the mid 1930s (A&B 229) following Bloch's (1937: 1437) defence of the Moscow show trials as necessary for the 'young Bolshevik' project.

[34] Adorno describes Auschwitz as an 'extreme social fact' (SSI 277). The Holocaust is *uniquely significant*, radically affecting how one can think about morality, sociology, education, society, culture (CM 47; NLI 266 7), linguistic expression (CM 125 6), art (MCP 110, P 34) and metaphysics. Yet Auschwitz was generated in exchange society. It is *inseparable from* 'the world of Auschwitz' (MCP 118), the world 'after Auschwitz and Hiroshima' (CM 268), the 'world of torture, which continues after Auschwitz' (MCP 101), e.g. 'in Africa and Asia' (ND 281): from its 'historical phase' (MCP 116).

by these studies, propose further research to locate likely intellectual pillars of barbarism in three broad domains. Firstly, he advocates examining the formation of potentially anti-Semitic characters among children. Parents who were followers of National Socialism, Adorno speculates, tend to excuse and defend themselves in front of their children, thus warming over and passing on old anti-Semitic arguments (VSI 361–2, 373). On their first day of school, children feel like outsiders facing a 'strange and cold' group. Shocked, they pass this '[p]ressure and coldness' on and ostracise others. Children who subsequently form, or even lead, exclusive cliques develop a particularly strong tendency towards anti-Semitism (VSI 374–6). Secondly, Adorno calls to investigate crystallisations of anti-Semitic prejudices in daily adult life. Given the official postwar German taboo, anti-Semitism, he argues (echoing the methodological debates in *The Authoritarian Personality* and *Group Experiment*), will not always be overtly expressed. Instead, it comes to the fore through whispers or rumours – 'Jews should not become too influential' (VSI 362–3), they 'avoid physical work' and are 'dishonest' (VSI 369–70) – in association with positive stereotypes – e.g. 'Jews are deep and clever', which is affinitive with 'they want to betray us' (VSI 377–8) – or in combination with nationalist and anti-intellectual attitudes. Thirdly, he attends to quotidian statements about the Nazi era, especially apologetic and self-defensive assertions: 'we didn't know what was going on', 'the victims must have done something to attract hatred', 'Dresden settled Auschwitz', 'the international community is at fault for having tolerated it' (CM 90–1), 'five, not six million were killed', 'war is war', 'Hitler was right in certain respects', 'it's time to move on' (VSI 367–8). Adorno's increasing focus on details most people can observe personally every day is consistent with much of his postwar sociology.[35]

Adorno understands these attitudes neither as those of isolated cranks, nor, ultimately, as specifically German. The potential of barbarism survives in the current social and economic conditions (CM 98–9, 191–2). What is striking with regards to Adorno's sociological analysis of capitalism is that he associates the intellectual prerequisites and possible

[35] Adorno's critique of survey methods reverberates here. Quantitative opinion polls diag nose a decrease in anti Semitism, but cannot register anti Semitic attitudes implicit in seemingly unrelated assertions and 'crypto anti Semitic' articulations in the media and daily conduct (VSI 361). In the 1950s, Adorno received anti Semitic book reviews: 'bourgeois Germany throws itself at the feet of the Jew Adorno', one author complained about *Minima Moralia* (Bernard and Raulff 2003: 127); another tried out a (fortunately untranslatable) play on Adorno's Jewish middle name (Adorno *et al.* 2003: 82n3). Adorno also pinpointed an elusive manifestation of dangerous thought patterns in a German TV guide inadvertently paying tribute to the Franco regime without causing public outrage (VSII 498 9).

supports for barbarism with the principle of identification. Identification fulfils intellectual requirements for genocide by dint of both of its characteristics sketched earlier. On the one hand, correspondently with the thought process in commodity exchange, identification renders the different equivalent by translating particular individuals into examples of one categorically determined general kind of mere things. Barbarism thrives on this intellectual operation in two intertwined ways. Firstly, the translation of the different into the same is compatible with the condemnation of the 'faintest trace' of the distinct, the unclassifiable, as 'unbearable' (JA 140). The other is 'moralistically rejected', such as the Jews as 'bloodsuckers and vermin' (VSI 275). Identification in its deadly guise prepares the 'anti-' in anti-Semitism. Secondly, without classifying dissimilar individuals as mere examples of the same group, without reducing different people to some categorical definition of the Jew – without anti-Semitism's 'Semites' – the verdict that all those defined as examples of the condemned group are unbearable and deserve annihilation is impossible (MCP 108, VSI 275, see also DE 140). 'Anti-Semitism, which transfers a range of negatively charged stereotypes without respect of the person onto an entire group, is unthinkable without the procedure of false generalisation; ... the collective singular for foreign peoples, the Russian, the American, the French, bears witness to this' (GEX 339). Identification is indispensable to sentencing entire populations to death: 'Genocide is absolute integration, which is prepared wherever humans are made equal ... until they, deviations from the concept of their complete nullity, are literally eradicated. Auschwitz confirms the philosopheme of pure identity as death' (ND 355). Nazism meant making humans the same to kill them (NLII 245). Humans were 'reifi[ed]', annihilated as 'things' (GEX 293–4). And still people perceive 'all other[s]' through 'the category "For or Against", as objects' (Adorno, Horkheimer *et al.* [1950] 1989a: 137). 'The chosen victim', Adorno argues in 'Sexual Taboos', is 'give[n] ... to understand that his fate is due ... to the fact that he happens to be somehow different, ... deviates from the collective, ... belongs to a precisely designated minority' (CM 76). On the other hand, identity thinking only conduces to barbarism on condition of its second characteristic: the adherence to socially produced concepts – be they stereotypes or statements about the necessity of attacking others – as if they trustworthily represented objective reality. The identificatory mechanisms of reified consciousness fulfil key requirements of barbarism.

According to Adorno, the anti-Semitic prejudices and dubious views on Nazism illustrated above are part of a collective, 'trans-subjective' stock of ideas. The individual accepts these thought patterns uncritically. But not arbitrarily: 'social pressure ... drives people toward the unspeakable, which

culminated ... in Auschwitz' (CM 191). Where individuals encounter society at all, Adorno argues, they feel 'incarcerated in a ... socialized, closely woven, net-like context', 'claustrophobi[c] ... in the administered world' of capitalism. Unable to escape, they develop a 'fury against civilization' which they direct against those perceived as 'weak' and 'happy' (CM 193). Adorno repeatedly emphasises the totally socialised, galvanised society's power to align individual thinking with perilous collective ideological patterns. People's dependence on an overpowering, petrified, putatively intangible whole not only intensifies their 'discomfort' – at the mercy of opaque economic trends, everyone feels 'potentially unemployed' (CM 97, ISW 248) – but also makes the integration of action and mind appear as the only option. 'If they want to live, ... no other avenue remains but to adapt ... to the given conditions', even if their reigning ideology is racist. 'The necessity of ... adaptation, of identification with the ... status-quo, with power as such, creates the potential for totalitarianism' (CM 98–9). '[W]eak egos', Adorno adds in psychoanalytic terms, look for 'compensation [in] identifying themselves with ... great collectives' (CM 94). In the 'solidified world', the 'individual's narcissistic ... drives' remain unsatisfied and find 'substitute satisfaction in the identification with the whole' (CM 96). Postwar democracy, Adorno specifies, raises the demand for autonomy. But democracy, an element of this solidified world, confronts people just like any other system beyond their control which places unintelligible restrictions on their agency as political subjects (CM 92–3). Hence people experience democracy, a potential shield against totalitarian setbacks, as inadequate and reject it. Vis-à-vis the immense constraints which the galvanised context imposes on individuals, the democratic 'obligation of autonomy' becomes a burden and they 'prefer to throw themselves into the melting pot of the collective ego' (CM 99). In the present social conditions, individuals lose the intellectual capacity and even the will to challenge socially prevalent prejudices and their underlying principles which potentially incite new barbarism. In this respect, maintaining capitalist society means sustaining the possibility of another Auschwitz.

> The pressure exerted by the prevailing universal upon ... individual people ... has a tendency to destroy the particular and the individual together with their power of resistance ... [P]eople ... forfeit those qualities by virtue of which they are able to pit themselves against what ... might lure them again to commit atrocity. Perhaps they are hardly able to offer resistance when the established authorities once again give them the order. (CM 193 4)

Zygmunt Bauman 'proceed[s] from the point to which Adorno or Arendt had brought' the 'unfinished task' (2000: 223) of analysing the Holocaust as a potentially recurring (2000: 11–12, 84–5) 'product ... of

modernity' (2000: 5). Bauman's seminal work *Modernity and the Holocaust* reveals its affinities with Adorno's investigations in several dimensions, for instance in the argument that the intellectual subsumption of every member of the victimised group under a category of 'the different' constitutes the first step towards systematically separating this group from 'ordinary people' and expelling it into moral irrelevance (2000: 26–7, 189–92, 227–9).[36] Yet Bauman's writings also reveal that Adorno's sociological investigations of the administered killings are far from exhaustive. Bauman situates the Holocaust at the intersection of the specifically modern project of 'engineering' a perfectly ordered society without 'blemishes', notably the Jews thus categorised (2000: 65–77, 91–3, 229–31), and the development of modern technological-bureaucratic forces.[37] Although Adorno, as mentioned, ascribes to modernity's 'productive forces' an important role in genocide (especially, like Bauman (2000: 89), to their scale), Bauman's analysis of these forces is more focused and penetrating. Bauman foregrounds the significance of bureaucratic-technological innovations such as the rigid order hierarchies of modern institutions, the division of work processes into synchronised elementary actions and methods for quantifying what is acted upon. These innovations allow agents operating within bureaucratic mechanisms to shift responsibility for their actions to superiors; to evaluate their actions by inner-organisational, technical standards (e.g. efficiency, precision), rather than by the result of the mechanisms which their actions help sustain; and to act at a distance from the outcome of these mechanisms and the human beings subjected to them (2000: 21–7, 98–105, 155–61, 192–200, 244–8). The agents' 'inhibition against inflicting suffering' is 'neutraliz[ed]' (2000: 184–5) and they are enabled to contribute to results which clash with their personal morality. These ideas are relevant from Adorno's vantage point, but largely underdeveloped in his texts. Nevertheless, Adorno's sociology of barbarism retains its actuality for contemporary sociological approaches to genocide not only as a source which needs critical refinement and expansion, but also by offering a distinct angle on problems raised by Bauman. When Bauman emphasises that '*inhumanity is a matter of social relationships*' (2000: 154), for instance, he primarily means that the modern technological-bureaucratic apparatus constitutes a necessary condition for mass killings. Adorno, too, places

[36] In 1949, Adorno wrote that fascist leaders and their followers 'do not acknowledge moral duties toward' the out group (VSI 275).

[37] Almost simultaneously, Boris Groys (1992: 33 74) analysed Stalinist culture as a project of world design. Groys's writings differ from Bauman's in terms of sources, approach, focus, and argument, but a critical juxtaposition of their ideas in this context would be valuable.

Auschwitz within contemporary social relationships. What distinguishes this analysis from Bauman's is that Adorno – again consistent with his notion that society's productive forces are ultimately entangled by its relations of production – sees the structure of identity thinking indispensable for genocide as inextricable from the ultimately decisive commodity exchange relations governing the present.[38] Moreover, Adorno develops a thoroughgoing analysis of the pressure with which capitalism's solidified, reified whole drives people to accept dangerous collective thought patterns.

Combating barbarism In Adorno's sociology, 'practical prospects . . . are limited. Whoever puts forward proposals easily makes himself into an accomplice' (CM 4). Yet given the continuing threat, doing nothing is no option. Consistent with his categorical imperative, Adorno's sociology supports the fight against barbarism not only by offering strategic references, but also by outlining – and delineating ways of partaking in – a programme for preventing another catastrophe: 'suggestions for praxis . . . may follow', although the 'path from insight to action' is longer than it seems to many (CM 308).

The battle against barbarism is desperate, insofar as it has its roots in basic social conditions and preventing it depends on overturning these conditions. Indeed, Adorno's interventions do not target the entire social fundament of barbarism. 'Since the possibility of changing the . . . social and political conditions breeding such events is extremely limited today, attempts to work against repetition are necessarily restricted to the subjective dimension' (CM 192). Adorno's programme targets the intellectual pillars of genocide, which were in sociological focus in the previous section. The struggle of those committed to ensuring 'that it will . . . never be like that again' (VSI 330) takes place in education. 'The premier demand upon all education', Adorno asserts, offering another rendition, 'is that Auschwitz not happen again. Its priority before any other . . . is such that . . . I need not and should not justify it' (CM 191).

Adorno makes several suggestions for counteracting the formation of anti-Semitism among children. Pedagogues should identify children who display 'ethnocentric' behaviour in school and discuss this with the parents. If the latter are anti-Semitic and cannot be convinced, children must be told that their parents can err. In the first weeks of school, teachers should create accommodating, playful environments so as to soften the shock of coldness that leads children to behave aggressively

[38] It is not certain that Bauman (2000: 80 1) would accept this association.

towards others. Exclusive clique formation should be prevented and friendships between individual children encouraged. Anti-intellectualism must be countered by teaching children how to be articulate; the identification of particular groups, races or religions with intellectual work must be undermined. Violence and ideological influence on others should be punished if necessary (VSI 373–8).

Many proposals for children form part of what Adorno calls a long-term programme against anti-Semitism. Adorno distinguishes between measures 'planned' further in advance and a short-term programme 'practiced immediately' (VSI 371). These categories do not fit neatly onto his proposals, though, and both programmes are also directed at adults. 'Immediate defence' against quotidian prejudice and dubious views on Nazism is distinguished by the use of authority and the fact that anyone can implement it in daily life. When one hears anti-Semitic assertions, one should respond firmly, take the most radical counter-position, even hand perpetrators over to the authorities, since the authoritarian character will be more impressed by authority than by weakness or fear (VSI 364, 371, 379–80). Yet in countering such statements, one should avoid 'casuistry' and encourage reflection on 'forms of thinking'. When people split hairs about the extent of the Holocaust, for instance, one should not cite numbers, lest one follows the same bizarre argumentative strategy. Rather, people must be made to realise that comparisons of acts of war like the Dresden bombing with the administered killings, or the 'only' in 'only five million were murdered', are based on absurd reasoning (VSI 367–8). The self-reflexive dimension of Adorno's long-term programme already makes itself felt here. Sympathisers of fascism, he adds, should be reminded of its consequences: war, shortages, calamities (keyword: Stalingrad), suffering (CM 103). Having tested some of his recommendations for everyday resistance on the anti-Semitic chauffeurs he confronted, Adorno closes affirmatively: 'I had the feeling that those chauffeurs, in their conscious conviction, anyway, left the police station with a slightly different mindset' (VSI 380).

Adorno's sociology of barbarism suggests that many of its intellectual pillars such as prejudices and stereotypes inhabit broader socially approved thought patterns uncritically adopted by individuals. This directs his decidedly anti-authoritarian long-term education programme against barbarism (VSI 371) towards a more basic target. Adorno's programme draws inspiration from Kant's (1991: 54) notion of 'self-incurred immaturity [Unmündigkeit]'. For Kant, immaturity designates 'the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another'. For Adorno, 'immaturity' or 'tutelage' names precisely the subject's current tendency to integrate its thinking: to acknowledge

authority uncritically and swallow socially generated deceptions about reality as indisputably true; to accept established dictates, even if they mean destruction (1971: 123, 141–2, 146). '[B]lind identification with the collective' (CM 197), the 'willingness ... to submit ... to what is stronger', to 'a norm', characterises those ready to serve the most criminal enterprises (CM 195). '[C]onventionalism' and 'conformism' join 'lacking self-reflection' (CM 94), the incapacity to scrutinise one's own mindset before acting and reacting in accord with it.

The only viable weapon against tutelage – Adorno cites Kant's corresponding up-to-date programme – is an education in maturity (*Mündigkeit*). Maturity means using one's own understanding, applying one's own critical faculty and thus having one's own experiences. 'Politically mature is the person who speaks for himself, because he has thought for himself and is not merely repeating someone else' (CM 281). An 'education in critique' (VSI 331), in resistance to intellectual integration, is needed: an education in contradiction, defiance, negation and the refusal to bow to collectives and socially imposed worldviews (1971: 109–10, 116–18, 133, 144–6). Such an education must be combined with instructions in self-reflection: in critically analysing one's own perception of, and relationship with, others, rather than simply 'lash[ing] outward' (CM 101, 193). This educational programme is 'debarbarising', particularly if it fosters a critical view of violence (1971: 129–30, 132). Kant (1991: 54) encourages individuals to whom 'immaturity ... has become almost second nature': '*Sapere aude!*' – Dare to know! – 'Have courage to use your *own* understanding.' The 'single genuine power ... against the principle of Auschwitz', Adorno presses, 'is autonomy, if I might use the Kantian expression: the power of reflection, of self-determination, of not cooperating' (CM 195).

Sociology not only strategically informs and outlines Adorno's educational programme, but, together with psychology, also plays a privileged public role in its implementation. Sociology and psychology can provide individuals with the intellectual devices for criticism and self-reflection. People require 'insight into what is essential in contemporary society', into 'the real social relations of power, dependencies and processes they are subjected to', into the interplay of the 'economy and society' (VSI 330). After all, 'the better one understands society', the harder it is to integrate (IS 3). In particular, 'education must transform itself into sociology' and 'teach about the societal play of forces that operates beneath the surface of political forms'. For sociological insights into political institutions enable individuals to question the justification of such institutions, notably the ideology that 'the right of the state' outweighs 'that of its members' (CM 203). With tacit reference to his earlier explorations

of fascist rhetoric, Adorno adds the recommendation to disseminate 'knowledge of the few durable propaganda tricks', because widespread awareness of these tricks would 'vaccin[at]e' individuals against them (CM 102).[39] Social science might also highlight the suffering individuals often have to endure to be accepted in collectives. This, too, could help 'work against the brute predominance of all collectives' and 'intensify resistance to it' (CM 197). Resistance to 'established opinions', 'existing institutions' and 'everything that is merely posited, that justifies itself with its existence', Adorno argues in more general terms, is supported by 'the ability to distinguish between what is known and what is accepted merely by convention or under the constraint of authority' (CM 281–2). Sociology plays an important role in fostering people's critical awareness of existing institutions, collectives and their ideologies.

Moreover, individuals need to be 'give[n] . . . contents, . . . categories, . . . forms of consciousness by means of which they can approach self-reflection' (CM 300). Psychologists can show individuals the 'mechanisms that cause racial prejudice within them' (CM 102, 193). For instance, psychology should raise awareness of the process by which subjects repress manifestations of their suffering, become indifferent towards it, but avenge themselves by causing pain to others. '[A]n education must be promoted that no longer sets a premium on . . . the ability to endure pain'. People must be encouraged to acknowledge their real anxieties, so that the 'destructive effect of unconscious and displaced anxiety' can 'disappear' (CM 198). In response to the allegation that Jews avoid physical work, to cite another example, one should not list Jews who work hard, because one would only meet anti-Semites on the level of their anti-intellectualism. Instead, the anti-Semite ought to be shown that outrage about those that seem to have it easier stems from the disappointing realisation that one must work hard oneself even though 'hard physical labour' has become 'superfluous' (VSI 369–70). In summary, the kind of critical reflection and self-reflection that would allow people to escape the tutelage and intellectual integration fostering barbarism hinges on a project of public enlightenment in the shape of sociologically and psychologically informed instructions about the outer and inner conditions in which barbarism can still breed. The categories required for analysis and reflection are to be disseminated in education, the media and public discussion groups (CM 196, see also 1971: 145–6). '[O]nly through common thinking work can the solidified' – the intellectual pillars of genocide – 'be dissolved' (VSI 330).

[39] In the 1940s, Adorno and Horkheimer encouraged psychological introspection and paid specific attention to manipulation by leaders. They even drafted a 'manual' for recognis ing manipulators (VSI 276 86).

Adorno once wrote: ‘to dispute that [Hegel] is an idealist must remain the prerogative of interpretive arts that follow the maxim . . . “rhyme or I’ll eat you”’ (HTS 59–60). The claim that Adorno is a theorist of revolutionary social praxis fares no better. Yet neither does the statement that Adorno retreated into theory and ‘never took th[e] step’ toward ‘*a program of action*’ (Buck-Morss 1977: 26). As a sociologist, Adorno was directly involved in the strategic preparation, programmatic outline and public realisation of political interventions targeting the preconditions of renewed barbarism. It is justified to describe Adorno’s measures as *only* interventions which are not revolutionary (Rycenga 2002: 372). The effects of his programme, Adorno concedes, may be slight: the abolition of the fascist danger, created by society, is beyond the ‘reach’ of education (CM 194). Yet the new categorical imperative in its various translations dictates that if there is even the faintest hope of helping to prevent the actual occurrence of further genocidal horror by undermining its ideological supports, then science and education must take steps to this effect. Although vis-à-vis the prevailing capitalist condition this is certainly ‘little enough’, vis-à-vis the continuing threat of catastrophe, even the slightest effect of Adorno’s programme is not nothing. To victims of the genocides of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries it could have meant everything.

5 The sociological text

In contemporary social science, notably in sociological theory, social research methodology and philosophy of social science, the epistemological and methodological questions of sociological analysis are of central importance. Although sociological thinking about social life is usually intertwined with writing about it, sociology's textual dimension has attracted considerably less attention. Adorno's sociological writings, too, are chiefly concerned with the problems and possibilities of a sociological investigation of exchange society. Yet Adorno, convinced that 'language constitutes thinking just like vice versa' (MCP 123), is unable to discuss sociological thought without engaging in detail with the question of the sociological text. The process of writing – neither purely thinking nor purely acting – is a prominent theme in his work on the discipline. Adorno repeatedly addresses the problems contemporary social conditions create for sociological writing. He examines sociology's possibilities to respond to those problems and to develop the potential of its texts to articulate something about social life in exchange society. A discussion of Adorno's vision of sociology's textual dimension is indispensable to an account of his views on the discipline and might offer sociologists ideas for more rigorous inquiries into the process of writing about social reality.[1]

Constellation in sociology

Adorno's ideas on written language depend on his notion of 'configuration' or 'constellation'. Adorno often describes his interpretive thinking as configurative.[2] Constellations are 'instruments of . . . reason' which, immersed

[1] On Adorno's style generally and in philosophy and aesthetics, see Buck Morss 1977: 96 135; Gillespie 1995; Held 1980: 210 12; Hohendahl 1995: 217 42; Jameson 1990: 49 72; Plass 2007: 1 48; Rose 1978: 11 26; Nicholsen 1997. I will focus on sociology's textual dimension.

[2] For succinct sociologico methodological remarks, see Bonß 1983: 207 10, and Ritsert 1983: 231 2.

in 'material' (1977: 131), 'penetrate what hides behind the façade as objectivity' (NLI 4). Simultaneously configuration describes Adorno's approach to writing. The double meaning is no coincidence: 'everything that is thought is also linguistic' (ND 117). A brief introduction to the concept of 'constellation' prepares the ground for presenting Adorno's perspectives on the problems confronting specifically sociological writing and on the potential of configuration to realise the aim of the sociological text: a 'very strict' (SSI 581) articulation of social phenomena and exchange society.

Configuring concepts

Adorno's constellations have three broader characteristics. Firstly, they consist of multiple categories. Theory's only devices, he emphasises, are concepts. 'It cannot paste its ontic substratum into the texts' (1999: 258). However, concepts have 'lost [their colours] historically in the process of estrangement' (AE 38). Thought does not dispose of a single category that satisfyingly represents what it refers to. A 'gap yawns' between concept and reality. This 'determinable failure' of all concepts means that none alone can exhaust analysis. Theory must 'summon' other concepts for examining the world (ND 62), assemble key categor*ies* to open the lock of each matter in turn.

Secondly, concepts in configurations are equal in rank to one another.[3] If interpretation and explanation were to rest on a 'basic category', this category would have to be clearly determined first. Definition, Adorno argues drawing on Dubislav (1931: 2, 17–20, PTI 9–10, PTII 15), ascertains the 'meaning' or 'use' of a 'sign'. A concept can be defined against another concept or determined 'deictically' in observation. Yet to rely on another category as a safe definitional benchmark or on observations as determinants is precarious (PTI 11–12). Much as if one were learning a foreign language without a dictionary, a category's meaning crystallises only in relation to all the other concepts of the assemblage: 'each is articulated respectively through the configurations with others' (NLI 13). A basic category, higher in rank than the others, is unavailable to sociological interpretation. A configuration 'coordinates elements instead of subordinating them' (NLI 22). Adorno distrusts sociological frameworks resting on 'magic words' or a 'single category . . . that can be attached to everything' and 'by which . . . everything can be explained': 'important conceptions . . . form contexts or constellations of categories for explanation, instead of summoning one of them to be the maid-of-all-work' (IS 113).

[3] Gillespie (1995), Hullot Kentor (2006: 134) and Jameson (1990: 61 2) discuss the musical connection.

Finally, configurations are neither 'unlogical' nor 'in simple opposition to discursive procedure', but 'obe[y]' the 'criteria' of logic and inference. '[S]entences', Adorno insists, 'must connect consistently'. What constellations lack, given the concepts' equality of rank, are first principles from which to deduce or conclude (NLI 22). Though respecting discursive procedures, configurations cannot proceed from or towards a more universal category logical step by logical step. Constellations examining phenomena contain experiments of 'regroup[ing] [umgruppieren]' concepts (1977: 131). The concepts relate to each other in compliance with logical inference, but not as a 'system'. Rather, 'one moment throws light on the other' (HTS 109). Configurative analysis pursues a 'reciprocal interaction of ... concepts in the process of intellectual experience'. Concepts 'do not form a continuum of operations. Thought does not progress one-sensically', but 'the moments are interwoven as in a carpet' (NLI 13). Constellations are assemblages of several equally ranked concepts, configured and reconfigured in coordinated relations according to the rules of inference.

Exchange society creates problems for sociologists not only in their quest for social analysis and critique, but also in their attempts to write about social reality. The configurative procedure constitutes Adorno's device for tackling these problems. A configurative text, he contends, creates opportunities for meeting the aim of sociological writing to present and critically articulate decisive characteristics of social phenomena and exchange society. This potential is threefold. Responding to integration, configurations present phenomena as they are characterised by their social dimension. In doing so, constellations *express* key aspects of social reality, especially of the social whole suffusing phenomena. *Re*configurations, finally, reach for perspectives on society's historical aspects.

Sociological configuration and integration

Social integration renders individual phenomena increasingly determined by the social whole. Examining and presenting phenomena in light of the properties they acquire by virtue of their characteristic social dimension is therefore ever more important sociologically. The 'tendency of integration of the capitalist system', Adorno states, 'necessitates the search for constellations' (ND 168). A constellation 'seeks the truth content' of a phenomenon in its 'historical mediations in which the whole society is sedimented' (NLI 11).

Social integration creates two sociological problems. Where every individual phenomenon and event is interconnected with all others in society, nothing under the sun can be treated in isolation. Nothing 'particular is

"true" but . . . by virtue of its mediatedness . . . always its own other' (PD 35–6). Single phenomena must be considered and presented with regards to the properties they acquire in being connected with others in society: 'the thing itself is its context, not its pure self-ness' (ND 165).

Moreover,

> there is a degree of system the social keyword is: integration which, as universal dependence of all moments on all, overhauls the talk of causality as outmoded; in vain the search for what inside a monolithic society is supposed to have been the cause. The cause is now only [society] itself. Causality has withdrawn as it were into the totality.

The 'universally socialised society' makes 'trac[ing] one state back to another single one' in causal sequences precarious. 'Every [state] hangs together with all others horizontally as much as vertically, tinges all, is tinged by all.' 'In the total society everything is equally close to the centre' (ND 264–5). Sociology must investigate all the causal sequences intersecting in every phenomenon.[4]

In endeavouring to examine and write about social reality, sociology can tackle both problems by following the configurative procedure. To the impossibility of isolating phenomena, constellations respond by summoning a multitude of categories. To interrelate concepts means to discuss a phenomenon in relation to others, to release it 'from the spell of its selfness' so that the 'object opens itself to . . . the awareness of the constellation in which it stands', of the 'history . . . within . . . and outside it', of 'something encompassing it, wherein it has its place' (ND 165). Assembling and interconnecting concepts conduces to highlighting the properties of the phenomenon that it acquires through its entanglement with others in society: its social, historical dimension. One of Adorno's major sociological references here is Weber's *Economy and Society* (1978). Weber's painstaking 'gathering of concepts', argues Adorno, constitutes the 'attemp[t] . . . to express' what the 'sought-after central' concept, e.g. capitalism, 'aims at' (ND 168). Adorno's formulations are also reminiscent of Simmel's sociology, especially if one follows Kracauer's reading of it, which Adorno probably knew intimately. According to Kracauer (1995: 233), Simmel's labyrinthine sociological essays seek to 'liberat[e] . . . phenomena from their isolation' and 'show how [each] is embedded in the larger contexts of life'. Simmel presents 'countless social manifestations' in view of their hidden interrelatedness and interactions with others. This is not to deny that Adorno and Simmel envision this configurative exercise differently: Adorno is concerned with the historically grown social web of

[4] Hence it was necessary to *interlink* exchange society's weightiest aspects in Chapter 1.

the integrated capitalist whole; Simmel resists the conception of '[t]he web or network of social relationships that goes to make up society' as a totality and views the 'social process' as 'dehistoricised' (Frisby 1981: 96, see also 1985: 41, 59, 71).[5]

To the impossibility of tracing one phenomenon back to another in unidirectional causal chains, Adorno's configurations respond by treating concepts as equals in rank. '[I]n the midst of the socialised world' where 'originality . . . has become a lie', configurations renounce the search for first categories and conceptual hierarchies for explanation. Interweaving concepts in coordinated figures instead, constellations treat 'all objects' as 'equally close to the centre' (NLI 19–20). Thus the intersections in each integrated phenomenon can be captured.

Adorno rejects Descartes' (1960: 50) methodical rule that 'each difficulty' must be dissected 'into as many parts as possible'; criticises as 'atomistic' (PD 41) Wittgenstein's contention that 'the analysis of propositions must bring us to elementary propositions' (1961: 59) which together give a 'complete description of the world' (1961: 63); and disputes Popper's (see PD 88) notion that sociology's subject matter is divisible into separate problems. 'In the context of society, the so-called solution of each problem presupposes this context' (PD 41). The 'investigation' of a social phenomenon remains 'false' (ND 166–7) as long as it ignores the complex interdependencies and intersections of phenomena in the social whole. These interdependencies must be represented in sociological writing. Treating social phenomena configuratively has the potential to meet this sociological objective: to examine and present a phenomenon in light of the characteristics it has acquired in relation to others in universal socialisation – its social dimension – however inconclusive and inexhaustible this endeavour may currently be.

Expressing social reality

Single concepts are socially limited in their capacity to identify. This became apparent in Chapter 1, where society persistently eluded concepts; in Chapter 3, regarding the limitations of sociological material and analysis; and in Chapter 4, in respect of the shortcomings of normative categories. Constellations of limited concepts certainly cannot exhaustively *identify* reality either. However, configurations presenting individual

[5] Adorno demarcates his sociology from Simmel's work mainly in passing. Where he (SSI 177 85) is about to engage with Simmel on sociological interpretation in a sustained fashion namely with Simmel's (1964) work on conflict Adorno ends up attacking Coser's (1956) and Dahrendorf's (1961: 197 235) 'conflict theories'.

phenomena in their social dimension, Adorno believes, have the potential for a further mode of articulation: they *express* something of social reality, particularly aspects of the social whole. Adorno (1999: 111) never defines expression, emphasising the difficulties of defining expression because it differs from conceptual identification. Understanding his views on the expressive potential of sociological configurations depends on understanding his notion of mimesis and, above all, on illustration. I will return to both aspects later. Initial clarification can be provided here.

Contra Wittgenstein's (1961: 151) dictum, '[w]hat we cannot speak about we must consign to silence', Adorno refuses to have his language silenced at the point where identification fails. He reckons with the possibility that constellations *express* what identifying concepts 'cut away'. '[T]hrough the relation in which it posits the concepts, centred around a thing', language 'serves the concept's intention to wholly express what is meant' (ND 164, see also HTS 100) – to 'say what . . . cannot be said' (PTI 82). In sociological configurations, expression chiefly constitutes another way of articulating aspects of social life, namely those insufficiently articulated by sociological concepts, especially the elusive characteristics of the social whole.

At first, Adorno's strategy for expressing society sounds disappointing: 'The freedom of philosophy is nothing other than the capacity of helping its unfreedom gain a voice. If the moment of expression tries to be more than that, it degenerates into a world-view' (ND 29). Once again, that is little enough; but once more, it is not nothing, for expressing the obstacles constraining thought precisely means expressing aspects of social reality.

Constellations assembling concepts respond to the limitations of social analysis created by social integration. They can be read as articulations of these obstacles. Summoning equally ranked concepts conveys the resistance of socially integrated phenomena to elementary and causal analysis. These obstacles are not conceptually identified. The process of assembling concepts itself conveys, namely *expresses*, the phenomena's resistance to elementary and causal analysis. Since this resistance consists in the socially integrated condition entangling phenomena in the densely spun web of exchange society, expressing the obstacles to social analysis through summoning equally ranked concepts is tantamount to expressing social integration – without using the identifying concept of 'integration'.

Adorno is particularly dissatisfied with the concepts of 'estrangement' and 'reification'. Since the social problems intended by these concepts continue to play a major role in his sociology, he requires alternative ways of articulating them. Adorno's hope lies with expression. The ideal that thinking culminate in 'the clarification of propositions' (Wittgenstein 1961: 49), warns Adorno, does not apply *a priori*. '[C]larity and

distinctness . . . are not themselves given'; the 'worth of cognitions' is not necessarily decided by 'how clearly and unequivocally [they] . . . present themselves' (HTS 100). Clarity, a property of thought and judgements (1993a: 24), can be definitive for thought '[o]nly if thinking and what is thought prove to be the same' (1993a: 33). Descartes' (see 1983: 19–20) clarity ideal is enforceable only when the object is held to be unambiguously graspable (HTS 98). In contemporary society, this cannot be assumed. Hence comprehensible language cannot be demanded. In a world enwrapped by exchange society, impenetrable and 'chaotic' to its 'victims' (Adorno 1973c: 45), standards of clear sociological writing are suspended. Where sociology still prescribes clear writing, it threatens to 'den[y] the complicated nature of . . . social relations indicated by the meanwhile overstrained terms estrangement, reification, functionality, structure' (PD 44).[6]

By avoiding such denial, sociological writing can broaden its expressive horizon. I argued that reflections which acknowledge the limitations of thinking (in) exchange society potentially enhance the experience of the underlying social condition, which appears increasingly opaque. Language, Adorno continues, must aim to 'articulate what of the world is dawning upon me, what I am experiencing as something essential in the world' (PTI 83). Whenever sociological writing encounters trouble, becoming unclear despite aiming for clarity, it can potentially be read as a response to, and thus as an articulation of, current obstacles to social analysis. A text's limitations to clarity can convey social reality's resistance to clarification. 'Misunderstandings are the medium in which the noncommunicable is communicated' (P 232). Again, articulation works without identifying this resistance. The very process of growing obscurity – the becoming-*un*clear of sentences itself, to modify Wittgenstein's formulation – conveys or, more precisely speaking, *expresses* social reality's resistance to clarification, its appearance as opaque nature. This opacity, in turn, is that of an estranged, integrated, reified and solidified society. To express the obstacles to clarification thus means to express these properties of society.[7]

Adorno underlines the expressive power of limited language in several passages. The 'inadequacy of [the] word' in Heine's poetry, for instance, expresses subjective 'suffering' vis-à-vis an irresponsive world. Such muted language simultaneously expresses the 'rupture' between the subject and its world (NLI 83).[8] Behind the discontinuities and ruptures of

[6] For Adorno's critique of Descartes, see also NLI 14 17, PD 40 1, PETG 142 5, 163.
[7] For clarity's sake, I generalise on 'unclearness' here. I will discuss specific figures below.
[8] See also Schultz 1990 on mimesis and Adorno's interpretations of poetry. On Adorno and Heine, see Plass 2007: 115 52.

sociological constellations stands the 'antagonistic essence' (NLI 16). Where writing runs into problems of clarity, 'socio-scientific cognition . . . expresses' – without using its overstrained categories – 'the complex nature of the process of production and distribution' (PD 44). As long as society and the individual remain 'unreconciled', the 'articulation of this relationship' is the '[t]ruth' (PD 36). 'The social estrangement of humans', ' . . . the disenchantment of the world, which made things and humans become mere things to humans, lends a second meaning to the incomprehensible': it tells of a reified and congealed society (NLI 179). Such writing is not only conducive to presenting society. Expressions of the subject's confrontation with an opaque, estranged society are expressions of suffering. Unclearness in sociological constellation has the potential to lend a voice to 'woe'. Through unclearness, 'woe speaks' a sentence whose brevity stands in inverse relation to its urgency in Adorno's socio-critical project: 'Go'.

Reconfiguration

Adorno reproaches '[f]anatics of clarity' for wanting 'to extinguish' the moment of 'exemplary evidence', of 'the "this is the way it is" within the horizon of ineradicable vagueness'. But one 'cannot stop there' (HTS 108). Unclearness is neither avoidable nor satisfactory. Unclear constellations express society's resistance to clarification, its appearance as opaque nature, and thus its estranged, petrified condition. Precisely in this respect, however, the second meaning of incomprehensibility is no more instructive than it is misleading. For the 'immanent universality of what is individual', which constellations seek to present, is not natural, but 'sedimented history' (ND 165): collective, socially reproductive human action deposited in phenomena like the elements on the surface of land.

It is not enough to experience unclear passages as a reader or, as a writer, to disclose them for their expressive potential. Few who have tackled Hegel's *Logic* will deny its frustrating difficulty. Yet, Adorno insists, the reader must also strive to understand 'why this or that must be incomprehensible and . . . thereby [understand] it' (HTS 123). Similarly, Kafka's readers should persevere with the 'incommensurable, opaque details, the blind spots' (P 248). Adorno's recommendation also applies to his own texts. Constellations are a 'legible script' (HTS 109) to be deciphered. In sociology, unclear passages must be interpreted further. Otherwise they conceal as much of exchange society as they articulate. Rather than leaving this to the reader alone, Adorno's writing itself, as will be illustrated shortly, aims to tackle its troublesome configurations for the purpose of further elucidation.

In Adorno's writing, this interpretive process also operates configuratively, or *re*configuratively, as a *re*ordering of the conceptual constellations

that culminated in unclearness. Concepts continue to be treated as equals and are rearranged according to the rules of inference. Of course, the aim of reconfiguration in sociology is not the clarification of textual passages per se, but to prevent the misrepresenting of the underlying social phenomena. The rearrangement of conceptual configurations ultimately constitutes the attempt to find holes in *society's* resistance to understanding and representation, to clarify as much as possible of the phenomena under consideration in their recalcitrant social mediation. 'What befalls the individual socially is indeed incomprehensible to [the individual] insofar as the particular does not find itself again in the universal: it is just that this incomprehensibility would have to be understood by science' (SSI 240).

To understand petrified social phenomena and their social dimension means to decode them as the historical reality subject to human intervention that they are:

> To become conscious of the constellation in which the thing stands means as much as to decipher the [constellation] that [the individual thing] as what has become carries within itself . . . Only a knowledge which is also conscious of the object's historical positional value in its relation to others can release history in the object . . . Knowledge of the object in its constellation is that of the process which it stores up in itself. (ND 165 6)

Sociology's double character also resonates in its textual dimension. In sociological writing, unclearness is neither to be suppressed where it is pressing – because unclearness instructively expresses an estranged, congealed society – nor to be condoned, because sociology cannot surrender its efforts to represent social phenomena as historical affair of humans.

One must remember that Adorno never felt able to overcome society's elusiveness and its resistance to analysis. There is no guarantee that reconfigurations will avoid further unclearness. Adorno's constellations articulate various perspectives on social reality, but they have no definite beginning or end. They do not necessarily proceed towards a satisfactory clarification of phenomena in their social mediation. Moments of expression and subsequent insights into reality constitute two intellectual poles. As the text unfolds, it alternates between passages curling up in difficulties, expressive of an intellectual experience of thought's limitations in the current conditions, and passages pursuing the interpretation reconfiguratively, in the hope that the constellation will crack the code of the matter at hand.

Constellation and mimesis

Thus crystallises the threefold potential of configurative texts to respond to the problems exchange society creates for sociological writing and to

meet the aim of articulating key characteristics of contemporary social life. Before illustrating these points, two aspects deserve further attention. The configurative procedure can be explored in more depth with reference to the work of Benjamin, Adorno's chief source and interlocutor here. It is also helpful to highlight the mimetic properties of language, which release the sociologically important expressive potential of constellations.

Benjamin's constellations

The configurative procedure operating in Adorno's sociological writings is inspired by Benjamin's discussion of constellation in the prologue of the *Trauerspiel* book (A&B 9). Yet Benjamin's own actualisation of constellation in social research did not always resonate well with Adorno. A closer look at these issues contributes to the understanding of Adorno's notion of, and intentions for, configurative writing in sociology.

Benjamin's conception of constellation relates to his view of truth as a 'being' which consists of 'ideas' and 'determines the essence of . . . empirical reality' (1998: 35–6). The question of how to unearth ideas from beneath the phenomenal surface is decided by Benjamin's critique of knowledge. The true idea or 'unity' of 'phenomena' is given to contemplation immediately as a 'unity in being'. Knowledge cannot grasp ideas – its 'object' is incongruent 'with the truth' – because it recognises unity only in mediation, as a 'conceptual unity'. Hence ideas, though 'only . . . grasp[able] . . . through immersion' in material 'details' (1998: 29–30), cannot be ascertained inductively as the unity of phenomena in their 'crude empirical state' (1998: 33). Induction would simply equate ideas with concepts pinpointing empirical phenomena (1998: 43). An idea, the true unity of phenomena, must be understood through the 'objective interpretation' of phenomena (1998: 34). Yet interpretation can be entrusted neither to a deductive system (1998: 32–3), nor to 'new terminologies', nor to intellectual intuition (1998: 35–7) – all of which entrap ideas in conceptual knowledge: in 'pseudo-logical continu[a]' (1998: 43) and modes of 'intending in knowing' (1998: 36). Renouncing the projection of truth 'into the sphere of knowledge', Benjamin proposes objective interpretations of the empirical world which aim to bring the truth home in the *presentation* of ideas in their immediate being (1998: 28–30). The devices for this endeavour are conceptual constellations.

The 'task' of presenting a 'descriptive plan of the world of ideas', Benjamin argues, places the philosopher in the 'elevated position between . . . scientist and . . . artist'. The scientist 'divest[s]' phenomena 'of their false unity' on the empirical surface, gathering phenomena and dividing them up through conceptual discrimination. The concepts with

which empirical reality was divided, and the elements thereby disassembled and released, are reordered by the artist into a new unity or 'configuration' (1998: 32–5). The phenomena's objective interpretation – the construction of the configuration – comes to present the phenomena's idea *qua* arrangement or association of the phenomenal world's elements. In constellations, ideas – the associational unity of phenomenal elements – are not communicated or intended by the respective concepts assembled, but *presented* in the intentionless being of the arrangement.[9] Truth comes to present itself (1998: 29–30, 35–8).

Adorno's meditations on configurative sociological writing have several affinities with Benjamin's prologue. Adorno, like Benjamin, acknowledges that interpretations of empirical phenomena depend on concepts inadequately representing what they intend. Adorno rejects 'operational' continua for using concepts interpretively, Benjamin 'pseudo-logical' ones. The alternative configurative procedure, which Adorno (1977: 127), like Benjamin, designates as the 'combination of . . . analytically isolated elements', is as important to Adorno's 1931 materialist programme as it is for the rest of his *oeuvre* (e.g. 1973c: 3). Finally, although Adorno attacks Benjamin's 'mythological' doctrine of ideal verities as unhistorical, he endorses Benjamin's 'magnificent . . . concept of configuration' (A&K 208–9). Configurations are meant to enable Benjamin's scientist–artist to present – rather than simply to intend – ideal truth. They enable Adorno's sociologist to present and express – rather than simply to identify – the social reality of exchange society.

It is all the more noteworthy that Adorno took issue with Benjamin when the latter was seeking to actualise the configurative procedure in social research. Adorno's critique formed part of their famous 1930s debates and Adorno's commentaries from subsequent decades. It has been argued that Adorno's misgivings were chiefly motivated by his political suspicions of the proletariat's role as a revolutionary subject in Benjamin's project (Buck-Morss 1977: 144–59; Lunn 1982: 166). Wolin's (1982: 163–212) book on Benjamin, which emphasises methodological and theoretical disagreements as central to the disputes between the two thinkers, seems more persuasive. In fact, as I shall highlight, many of the methodological and 'epistemological' (A&H1 73) considerations guiding Adorno's critique of Benjamin's attempts to employ configuration in social research addressed a *sociological* question: how could configurations meet the objective of articulating the social conditions of capitalism?

[9] For a more elaborate discussion of Benjamin's prologue in relation to Adorno's presenta tion, see Jameson's (1990: 49 58).

Adorno dealt mainly with Benjamin's plans for a historiography of the nineteenth century focusing on the Paris arcades.[10] Benjamin's objective, which Adorno endorsed, was to construct 'dialectical images' through the principle of constellation. 'Where thinking suddenly comes to a stop in a constellation saturated with tension', wrote Benjamin, 'it gives that configuration a shock, by which thinking is crystallized as a monad' (2006: 396): 'the dialectical image appears' (1999: N10,3). Benjamin sought to present 'the expression of the economy in its culture[,] . . . an economic process as perceptible *Ur*-phenomenon,[11] from out of which proceed all manifestations of life in the arcades (and, accordingly, in the nineteenth century)' (1999: N1a,6). This 'materialist presentation of history' aimed to bring 'the present into a critical state' (1999: N7a,5). Capturing a dialectical image meant capturing an 'image of the past which unexpectedly appears to the historical subject in a moment of danger' – the danger of succumbing once again to serving the status-quo (2006: 391). This 'now of recognisability' (1999: N18,4) was to be the moment of 'awakening of a not-yet-conscious knowledge of what has been' (1999: N1,9). The image had to show the collective historical subject that it was the rising sun to which past generations of the downtrodden had turned in expectation (2006: 390–1). 'Such a presentation of history' strove 'to pass . . . "beyond the sphere of thought"' (1999: N10a,2).

Upon encountering Benjamin's outlines of his project's modus operandi, Adorno recognised substantial differences between his own interpretation of the configurative method and its actualisation in Benjamin's research. Benjamin's 1935 *Arcades exposé* conceived dialectical images as presentations of collective desire-images which recounted wishes to overcome the imperfect productive order, contained dreams of a new epoch, and rekindled archaic, collectively unconscious experiences of a classless society. The utopian dream had 'left its trace in a thousand configurations of life' (1999: 4–5). Benjamin proposed to extract and use these 'dream elements' for animating the current epoch's historical awakening (1999: 13). Adorno rejected Benjamin's 'transpos[ition of] the dialectical image into consciousness' as a 'simplification' affecting their 'truth content' (A&B 105). Constructing dialectical images, he maintained, should mean constructing 'objective constellations in which the social condition finds itself represented' (A&B 110). The subject of the dream was the estranged bourgeois individual whose mindset had been produced by the commodity world, but whose dream could not simultaneously depict it

[10] On Benjamin's project, see Buck Morss 1991 and Gilloch 1997.
[11] On this concept, see Dodd 2008.

(A&B 105–7). The dream, Adorno pressed, required critical interpretation as a 'constellation of reality' (A&B 106).

What Benjamin's project urgently required, wrote Adorno to Horkheimer, following these debates, was 'clarification' on the 'dialectical image' (A&H1 344). But although Benjamin revised his procedure, his proposals kept troubling Adorno. Adorno continuously emphasised the need for configurations capable of presenting capitalist social conditions. Benjamin's images, he thought, still failed to deliver. Adorno's ongoing doubts hinged on two aspects of his reading of Benjamin's configurative method from 1935 onwards. Firstly, he ascribed to Benjamin the 'intention ... to have the meanings emerge solely through a shock-like montage of the material'. Benjamin's 'magnum opus was to consist solely of citations' (P 239). Not that Benjamin relied on empirical immediacy. History's empirically transparent order was not its truth, but history as exhibited in the 'triumphal procession' (2006: 391) and seen through the 'kaleidoscope' of the present rulers. Benjamin commanded to 'smas[h]' this kaleidoscope (2006: 164). Only a 'historical object torn from its context' could be presented in the dialectical image (1999: N11,3). Citing history did not mean listing facts, but interpreting historical material by summoning its components away from their immediate empirical context and configuring them anew to construct the image.[12] Adorno recognised Benjamin's opposition to society's blinded perspective (P 236) and his effort to 'wrench each thought' in the *Arcades Project* from the 'sphere of delusion' (A&B 381). What Adorno emphasised was that Benjamin entrusted the configuration of material alone with constructing dialectical images as the material's interpretations; that he sought 'to relinquish all *overt* interpretation', excluding from configurations the concepts of a theory of exchange society and explicit commentary; that he pursued the 'audacious venture of a philosophy purified of argument' (P 239, emphasis added).[13]

The second, closely related aspect emerged chiefly in relation to Benjamin's 1938 'The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire': to analyse 'individual features from the realm of the superstructure ... by relating them immediately, ... perhaps even causally, to ... corresponding

[12] *Zitieren* also means to summon (one might be *zitiert* before a court, for instance).

[13] Some *Arcades* fragments (1999: N1a,8, N7a,1) arguably substantiate Adorno's reading. Yet Benjamin's 'disorderly construction site' (Gilloch 1997: 94) belongs to an unusually multifaceted *oeuvre*. Postmortem ascriptions of authorial intentions remain precarious. Other Benjamin scholars have addressed similar questions without answering them in unison (Arendt 1968: 59; Buck Morss 1991: 73 4; Frisby 1985: 188 9; Gilloch 1997: 100 15; Handelman 1991: 143; Missac 1995: 144 5; Tiedemann in Benjamin 1991b: 1072 3; Tiedemann in Benjamin 1999: 1013n6).

features of the infrastructure' (A&B 283). Adorno cited Benjamin's (2006: 7–8) reading of Baudelaire's (1972: 155–6) 'Le vin des chiffonniers' ('The Wine of the Ragpickers') in direct association with material on the French government's wine tax. For Benjamin, Adorno alleged, '[t]o interpret phenomena materialistically meant . . . not so much to elucidate them as products of the social whole but . . . to relate them immediately, in their isolated singularity, to material tendencies and social struggles. Benjamin thus sought to avoid . . . estrangement and reification' (P 236).

Adorno rebuffed both proposals for employing configuration. Acknowledging Benjamin's interpretive aims, Adorno doubted that Benjamin's 'ascetic discipline' in the *Arcades Project* – material configurations without 'theoretical interpretation' – could accomplish them (A&B 281). Adorno even conceded that Benjamin was aiming for '*theory* of the highest rank, may it be called philosophical or social', but queried the possibility of realising the 'theoretical intention' solely by configuring 'sociologically relevant materials' (VSI 179, emphasis added). The phenomena treated by Benjamin, Adorno remarked on the first aspect, were shaped by the capitalist social whole (PD 39). Benjamin was not accused of believing that this dimension was immediately discernible. Yet Benjamin's mode of interpretively acquiring perspectives beyond the material's misleading immediacy could not unearth its social dimension. Discerning the material's social dimension, Adorno insisted, was reserved for '*theoretical* construction'. By expelling the concepts and commentary of a theory of society from configurations, Benjamin dispensed with the 'mediation' of the material 'through the entire social process' and thereby with fully illuminating the socially determined phenomena at issue (A&B 284).

The *Arcades Project*'s second aspect – relating the material to 'adjacent features in . . . social history' (A&B 282) – provided no remedy, Adorno continued. In capitalist integration, individual phenomena had waived the 'spontaneity, tangibility and density' that would allow for concluding on one specific instance with reference to another. 'The materialistic determination of cultural traits is possible only in mediation through the *total social process*' (A&B 283). Again, configurations therefore required concepts that tackled the social whole. Without such concepts, Benjamin's constellations could not adequately elucidate and present the material in terms of exchange society. Benjamin's employment of the configurative principle, Adorno charged, left his 'ideas . . . immured behind impenetrable layers of material' and, his interpretive aims notwithstanding, ended up 'conspir[ing] . . . against . . . interpretation' (A&B 281). Adorno confronted Benjamin with an example from 'Second Empire'. The ragpicker's misery, Benjamin (2006: 8) argued, 'fascinated . . . investigators of pauperism', while socially rebellious bohemians saw that they,

too, 'faced a . . . precarious future'. For Adorno, these interrelations did not exhaust the potential of a sociological interpretation, which he signposted with regards to integration: 'the capitalist function of the ragpicker' was 'to subject even rubbish to exchange value'. Benjamin's configurations suggested, but failed to 'articulat[e]', this (A&B 284).

His debt to Benjamin's constellation method notwithstanding, Adorno's approach to exposing the governing capitalist condition led him to disagree with the actualisation of configuration in Benjamin's 1930s social research. To properly penetrate its materials, configurative interpretation, Adorno maintained, had to relate them to the social whole. This required configurations to draw in theoretical concepts. Adorno had in mind his theory of exchange society, introduced in Chapter 1 and a point of reference since then. Since Benjamin's constellations relinquished theoretical concepts and commentary, none of them could – though interpretive – meet their socio-analytical and presentational objectives. Although Benjamin's defence (A&B 289–96) cannot be discussed here, it must be accentuated that Adorno's interventions are not immune to challenge and have met serious opposition. Agamben (2007: 117–37) questions precisely the arguments about methodology and objectives at the heart of Adorno's criticisms. Nevertheless, Adorno's objections elucidate his specific notion of the configurative procedure and underline that the key purpose he envisages for it is closely related to his sociological project: a critical examination and articulation of exchange society.

Expression and mimesis

For Adorno, expressing characteristics of social reality constitutes an important aim of configurative sociological writing. Yet he has difficulties conceptualising expression, given its divergence from identifying concepts in textual articulation. Further clarification is possible in connection with mimesis. Parallel to expression in the text, mimesis diverges from identification in the realm of cognition.[14] It is precisely through actualising cognition's mimetic behaviour in writing that the sociological text develops its expressive potential.

Mimesis characterises a mode of experience irreducible to identification. Whereas in identification a concept subsumes different elements of reality, in mimesis the subject 'makes itself' – its intellectual and physical behaviour – 'resemble its surroundings' (DE 154). '[M]imetic behaviour

[14] Hence mimesis is as elusive to conceptualisation as expression. I treat mimesis purely in configuration with identification, cognition and expression. On mimesis, see Cahn 1984; Connell 1998; Jay 1997; Schultz 1990; Nicholsen 1997: 137 80.

proper' means 'organic nestling up to the other'. Formerly, Adorno and Horkheimer argue, mimesis crystallised as 'mimicry', as immediate physical reactions to external dangers – 'hair stand[ing] on end and the heart stop[ping]' –, as 'assimilation to ... motionless nature' (DE 148; see also Geml 2008). Such panic-stricken 'mimicry of death' is also audible in the paralysed, 'mechanical'-sounding whistles of Alpine marmots (OL 326–7). Vestiges of human mimetic behaviour subsequently survived in the shamanic rituals of tribal societies, which illustrate the distinction between mimesis and identification. The shaman's engagement with the external world assimilated his gestures to reality, e.g. to nature or spirits 'to frighten or placate them', rather than imposing his uniform conceptions onto the world. Moreover, the shaman's reactions changed with what was encountered, rather than making the 'wind, the rain, the snake ..., the demon inside the sick person' fully fungible as 'specimens' of classifiable kinds (DE 6). Advancing 'civilization' has progressively pushed mimesis out of human life. The 'bodily assimilation to nature', the process of making oneself resemble reality, has gradually given way to 'recognition in a concept' (DE 148), the identifying subsumption of different aspects of reality under socially produced, subjectively projected categories.

Yet mimesis has not been eradicated. Kafka offers outstanding literary references for mimesis in art, as does his contemporary Proust (NLII 30). More recently, Beckett's work has 'ma[de] itself the same as [the spell]': it is 'as abstract as the relations of humans' (Adorno 1999: 31). And '[w]hen an occupying German officer visited [Picasso] in his studio and asked, standing before *Guernica*, "Did you make that?," Picasso reportedly responded: "No, you"' (NLII 89).

Crucially here, Adorno is concerned with rescuing mimetic behaviour for cognition. The cognising subject, an organic, socialised human being, is part of material and social reality. This affinity between subject and world is a precondition for cognition (AE 143n). If the subject were strictly severed from reality, the subject could have no grasp of reality. Simultaneously, 'in the thesis that only the similar is capable of [cognising the similar], the indelible moment of mimesis in all cognition ... reaches consciousness' (ND 153). For if the subject only imposed its own identificatory preconceptions upon reality – wholly without making itself similar to it – cognition would only contain its own intellectual products (ND 55). 'Without mimesis, the break between subject and object would be absolute and cognition impossible' (AE 143n). The idea that 'only the similar can cognise the similar', Adorno argues, is also justified 'in sociology' – where it may even be less problematic than in natural science – because both sociology's 'object ..., society', and its 'knowing subject' are 'living human beings'.

Yet this does not dispense sociology from cultivating its corresponding mimetic moment. Sociological methods, for instance, must be developed 'in a living relationship to [their] subject matter', as mentioned in Chapter 2 (IS 72).

Like most of Adorno's projects, rescuing mimesis for cognition more generally is not a straightforward one. Social integration and petrifaction create the same problems here that they create for cognition generally. Direct encounters with reality use categories provided by contemporary intellectual conventions and confront a socialised object, but the subject cannot immediately see through the social dimensions of categories and objects and onto the object itself.[15] '[T]he similar has been irretrievably torn away from the similar'; 'subject and object ... are estranged from each other'. Hence immediate perceptions of reality – primary physical and mental reactions – are usually misleading. The subject's mimetic effort to make itself faithfully resemble reality must take a more complicated route familiar from earlier considerations: 'in the renouncement of ... semblance ..., lost mimesis is preserved, not in the conservation of its rudiments' (AE 143). Critical non-identity thinking, the determinate negation of identificatory schemata, is now a prerequisite for bringing subjective cognition and objects close together. Only where thinking no longer insists on, but unsettles, the concepts into which identification forces reality, can the subject still nestle up to the object itself: 'The objective content of individual experience is produced ... through the dissolution of what prevents ... experience ... from giving itself to the object ... until [the subject] truly fades into the object with which it is akin in virtue of its own being an object [Objektseins]' (CM 253–4). As expression diverges from identification in the realm of articulation, the mimetic aspect of critical theoretical analysis thus keeps diverging from identification in the realm of cognition.

Adorno deems cognition inseparable from language. Echoing Benjamin's dictum that saying makes thinking real (2005: 723), he writes: '[t]hinking becomes precise only ... through linguistic presentation' (ND 29). Indeed, when the mimetic effort of analytical thought to resemble reality appears in writing – here: configurative writing – the text itself develops mimetic qualities. Given the 'primacy of the conceptual-significative aspect', mimesis is more 'suppressed' in printed language than in music (NLII 30). Nevertheless, theory is 'allied with art in wanting

[15] The upshot, Marcuse (1964: 10; see also Horkheimer 2004: 79) warns, is mimesis as the subject's 'immediate identification ... with ... society'; what Nietzsche (1974: 316) calls 'mimicry' *qua* capacity of 'always adapting ... again to new circumstances'. See also Schultz 1990: 47 52.

to rescue, in the medium of the concept, the mimesis that the concept represses' (HTS 123).

This *mimetic* moment of the text is simultaneously its moment of *expression* (ND 29, PTI 83). In making itself similar to reality, language no longer merely signifies, but brings 'thing and expression nearer to each other to the point of indifference' (ND 65–6). '[T]he mimetic' and 'expressive activity' belong to the same behaviour. Philosophy, Adorno presses, must 'restore, by means of the concept, that moment of expression, that mimetic moment' (PTI 81). In sociological texts, too, those elements resonating 'like discordant music' disclose a procedure of writing *qua* nestling up to social reality, which 'surpasses mere signification and comes to resemble expression' (PD 35). It is through mimesis, through making itself *resemble* social reality, that configurative sociological writing lends expression to social reality, notably to what identifying concepts have 'cut off'.

The German term for 'presentation', *Darstellung*, illuminates this idea. In Adorno's work, *Darstellung* realises theory's 'unconceptual-mimetic', 'expressive moment' (ND 29). In aesthetics, *Darstellung* simultaneously designates an actor's (*Darsteller* in German) or a musician's performance, the mimetic emulation of the artwork's 'dynamic curves' (1999: 125; see also Nicholsen 1997: 149). 'To play music correctly means . . . to speak its language properly. This calls for imitation . . . Music discloses itself in mimetic practice' (Adorno 1998c: 3–4). 'Impersonation', 'performance' and 'acting' are further instructive English terms for *Darstellung*. They reveal that Adorno's configurative presentations *express* reality in the sense in which they mimetically perform or *enact* it.[16] Adorno disputes that the complexity of sociological propositions is necessarily due to the researcher's 'confusion' or 'pomposity': 'the objects decide objectively whether social theorems must be simple or complex' (PD 41). A faithful expression of a complex, impenetrable, integrated, petrified social world will make itself resemble that world. As 'grimace[s]' – facial expressions – perform 'displeasure' (DE 150), Adorno's sociological configurations can be said to enact – so as to express – aspects of social reality.

This mode of writing constituted a long-standing interest of Adorno's (A&H1 55, 175). Although the term 'mimesis' does not inform his earliest output, his efforts to make his writing similar to the matter for expressive

[16] In his account of *Darstellung*, Jameson (1990: 67) accentuates the 'mimetic', 'gestural' quality of Adorno's sentences: they 'act out the content of what is in them abstractly grasped as philosophical thinking or argument'. Plass (2007: 37, see also 6, 25) calls Adorno's essays 'the almost *theatrical* event . . . of intellectual experience'. Just how deeply Adorno's ideas on mimetic expression have penetrated his sociological work, where they concern the enactment of social reality, will become clearer shortly.

purposes were manifest as early as 1925. Adorno was about to write an article on Berg's opera *Wozzeck*, when the composer had to ask one favour: 'Do not write in a *difficult* way! . . . [E]xpress yourself in *generally comprehensible* terms. I am sure this will pose no problem' (Adorno and Berg 2005: 25). Berg soon realised just how big a problem this was for Adorno (Adorno and Berg 2005: 44). What would 'Schönberg . . . say', Adorno replied defensively, 'if a short-eared person demanded . . . that he . . . compose a bar more simply than he had heard it and it must objectively be heard'? The essay needed to be 'measured by the matter, not the audience'. If the music at issue were easy – an inappropriate adjective for *Wozzeck* – his difficult 'essay would belong into the flames' (Adorno and Berg 2005: 37–8; see also A&K 235).

Adorno once underlined Bloch's efforts to connect 'cognition and expression' in the face of the 'estrangement of subject and object' (VSI 191). Yet during the 1920s–30s, Adorno was primarily thinking under Benjamin's influence, especially regarding configurative writing. One might think that Benjamin's influence extended to Adorno's notion of mimetic writing. Benjamin also harbours a notion of mimesis *qua* making oneself similar to, which concerns human behaviour (2005: 720; 2006: 184), experience (1996: 447–8) and translation (1996: 260, 449). Moreover, Benjamin's writings on mimesis from the 1930s conceive of language as mimetic, namely – contra theories of language centred on onomatopoeia – as an archive of 'non-sensuous similarity'. In the 'context of the meaning of words or sentences', similarity 'flash[es] up' (2005: 721–2). Benjamin underlines his concern with configurative language here. The *Arcades Project*, Gilloch (1997: 94) writes, is not 'a description of the urban (text-about-city), but . . . urban in character (text-as-city)'. Nonetheless, Adorno may well have developed his association between configurative language and mimesis independently of Benjamin, who holds perspectives on the very condition of the possibility of mimetic language that Adorno could not accept. In Benjamin's (1996: 68–72) 1916 language essay, the affinity between human language of the name and the nameless language of things is founded in God. His 1930s pieces on mimesis – by contrast, to be sure – bear a stronger 'historical-anthropological dimension' (Rabinbach 1979: 61), but also still evoke 'mystical or theological language theories' (Benjamin 2005: 696).[17] For

[17] The anthropological dimension of the 1930s mimesis pieces, Handelman (1991: 79 80) argues, testifies to Benjamin's 'materialist shift' and serves him as 'a less theological guarantee for [language's] objectivity and cognitive possibilities'. Simultaneously, though, the mimesis pieces seem to illustrate Gilloch's (2002: 20, 25; see also Moses 1989: 236) conviction that Benjamin's work configures several certainly also theological and materialist motifs *throughout*.

Adorno, the condition of possibility of mimetic language is *solely* the social and material affinity between the subject and the reality it seeks to cognise.[18] Adorno's idea of mimesis specifies the potential of configurative writing to express reality. By making themselves similar to, by making themselves resemble – by enacting – the aspects of social reality to be articulated, written constellations in sociology can express those aspects.

Illustration

Explaining the concepts of constellation and mimesis is indispensable to elucidating the mode of presentation at work in Adorno's sociological writings. Yet such expositions will remain unnecessarily abstract unless they are combined with a case study which – against the backdrop of his theoretical considerations discussed so far – illustrates in detail how Adorno's mode of presentation operates in one of his sociological pieces. Drawing attention to some typical criticisms of the way in which Adorno presents his thought allows me to begin by re-emphasising his aims for writing sociological texts.

The question of clarity

Adorno's writing is notoriously difficult to read. As a result, it has received much criticism, of which 'professorial bombast' (Kołakowski 1978: 368) and 'unpleasan[t]', 'turgid style' (Goldstein 2004: 270) are the bluntest formulations. On one level, critics attack Adorno for failing to meet certain textual standards. Popper (1940: 411) deems it 'a duty for everyone who wants to promote truth and enlight[en]ment, to train himself in the art of expressing things clearly and unambiguously'. Hence he pillories the 'cult of un-understandability' surrounding Adorno's 'high-sounding language' (PD 294). Similarly, Lazarsfeld lambastes Adorno for violating the benchmarks of 'discipline[d] . . . presentation' (A&H2 446). From a slightly different angle, Miller classes Adorno's writing as 'bad'. He argues that Adorno sought to escape capitalist conformity by 'abjuring any effort to address a large audience of ordinary people' (1999–2000: 41). Since his writings are now popular among many 'left-leaning intellectuals', they have 'lost their antithetical use value' and become 'hackneyed and predictable' (1999–2000: 43).

Adorno insists on the 'difference between language as a means of communication and as one of the matter's precise expression' (CM 28).

[18] For a discussion of the affinity between Adorno's and Benjamin's conceptions of mimesis, see Nicholsen 1997: 137 80. For a contrasting view, see Jameson 1990: 256n37.

To him, the standard of faithfully articulating reality overrides the criterion of clarity. It also overrides the criterion of non-conformity. Adorno holds resistance through expression a worthwhile objective (see MM 80), which might render his 'popularity' problematic. But the key benchmark of writing remains the faithful articulation of reality. Conceding that such writing is likely to escape public understanding, the passage meant by Miller's critique still argues primarily for 'precis[e], conscientiou[s], objectively appropriat[e]' formulations, for 'expression' with '[r]egard for the object' (MM 101).[19] The observation that Adorno's texts are obscure and widely read could only amount to a persuasive case against his difficult writing if it were shown that his texts should primarily answer to standards of clarity or low readership.

More intriguing critiques unfold on another level, located by the title of Miller's essay: 'Is Bad Writing Necessary?' Saying that it is not, Popper draws a table presenting difficult passages from Adorno's sociology which Popper translates into simpler language (PD 297). In consonant spirit, Lazarsfeld replies to one of Adorno's recalcitrant radio memoranda:

> The pages are full of: 'prima facie'; 'e contrario'; 'conditio sine qua non'; and so on. There is no doubt that the words 'necessary condition' express everything which the corresponding Latin word can express. But you evidently feel magically more secure if you use words which symbolize your education although they are a trouble for any stenographer and a hidden offense against any American colleague; just because American professionals are not brought up to use Latin words unnecessarily we are not yet better than they are. (A&H2 445)

Kalkowski also questions the indispensability of the 'enigmatically staged thought per se' (1988: 5), describing Adorno's texts as the 'aesthetic mise en scène' of 'a "jargon of dialectics" spun over the "objects" and projected onto them' (1988: 2). Here, Adorno's standard of writing, 'to form the true image of . . . reality' (Horkheimer 1985: 287), is implicitly acknowledged. The charge is that Adorno's writing is *unnecessarily* obscure. Since at this point none of the critics dispute Adorno's theory of social reality – Popper (PD 297) does 'not assert' that Adorno's theory of social wholes 'is mistaken[,] . . . only . . . the complete triviality of its content'; Lazarsfeld has 'respect for your ideas . . . [b]ut . . . great objections against the way you present' them (A&H2 436) – the criticisms imply that the social conditions Adorno seeks to articulate can be articulated in more accessible, less

[19] Miller (1999 2000: 35) reads Adorno's image of writing 'spiders' webs: tight, concentric, . . . well spun' as showing that Adorno 'hoped to snare readers in a tightly woven net of metaphors and ideas'. Adorno's image is not concerned with readers, but with textual presentation: with drawing in '[m]etaphors', '[m]aterials' and 'citations' for the purpose of 'penetrat[ing]' and illuminating reality (MM 87).

forbidding language. The following illustrations of the configurative procedure operating in Adorno's sociological writing are meant to elucidate the textual dimension of his sociology. Shedding light on this dimension inevitably means spotlighting the idiosyncratic qualities of his sociological texts. Simultaneously, Adorno's reasons for writing the way he writes will become clearer and support an informed response to the question whether he could have replaced his formulations with simpler ones without failing to reach his objectives.

The theory–praxis configuration

Adorno's 'Marginalia to Theory and Praxis', published in *Catchwords*, serves as an exemplary case for illustration (although other texts will also be consulted). 'Marginalia' is particularly revealing for two reasons: firstly, the *Critical Models* volumes contain several of Adorno's sociological examinations of exchange society; secondly, Adorno occasionally uses the term 'model' for 'constellation'. Chapter 4 already discussed some of 'Marginalia's' content, which allows the focus to shift onto the text's formal properties. Adorno's piece consists of fourteen numbered sections, each about a page and a half long. Each section treats an aspect of the relationship between theory and praxis in exchange society. Before analysing this text as a specifically sociological configuration, it is useful to indicate how it actualises the more general features of constellations outlined earlier: 'Marginalia' summons a multitude of concepts which it coordinates as equal in rank seeking to follow the rules of logical inference.

In attempting to articulate the theory–praxis relation in capitalism, 'Marginalia', one of Adorno's last texts, illustrates his response to a dilemma stated by one of his earliest, 'Theses on the Language of the Philosopher', from 1932: 'the objectively available words . . . are devoid of being'; theory's only 'hope' lies in 'plac[ing] the words around the new truth so that their configuration itself yields the new truth' (2007: 38). The limitations of its only devices – concepts – force the analysis to summon a multitude of key categories. The concepts *theory* and *praxis* alone cannot represent the theory–praxis relation in capitalism. 'Marginalia' must assemble and configure several further categories, including *subject, object, rationality, value-freedom, intellectual labour, physical labour, violence, means* and *ends*, in order to unlock the matter.

Adorno's opening line already summons the concepts of *subject* and *object*: 'the question of theory and praxis depends upon that of subject and object' (CM 259). The concepts *subject* and *object* are germane to tackling the theory–praxis relation for many reasons, above all because 'the

problem of praxis is interwoven with that of cognition' (CM 260).[20] The first consciously experienced 'crisis of praxis was experienced as: not knowing what one should do' (CM 261). In conditions obstructing the subject's experience of the object, praxis without theory is damaged.

In sociology, Adorno continues, the division between practical and theoretical questions evokes questions of *rationality* and *value-freedom*. For Weber (1978: 24–6), actions following the evaluation of adequate means in view of their ends are goal-rational, even if the ends are value-based or otherwise subjectively determined. The possibility of separating purposes and rationality, argues Adorno, parallels the separation of praxis from theory which informs the doctrine of value-freedom. Echoing Horkheimer's (2004) *Eclipse of Reason*, Adorno vehemently criticises Weber. Where the goal is the destruction of millions, contradicting the rational purpose of mankind's self-preservation, even an action whose destructive means are most adequate to the goal is *ir*rational (CM 272–3). The interlinking of the theory–praxis relation with these problems leads Adorno to assemble the concepts *rationality* and *value-freedom* to help present that relation. The theory–praxis constellation contains several further key categories. Adorno's reasons for inserting each one would afford longer discussion. What emerges clearly here is the way in which 'Marginalia' summons concepts in addition to *theory* and *praxis* and arranges them in logical argumentation so as to present the theory–praxis relation in capitalism.

Adorno's configurations contain no basic category, no 'magic word' taking care of explanation. Social reality is articulated through *co*ordinations of equally ranked concepts. 'Marginalia's' discussion of the problem of praxis, P, and the subject–object dichotomy, S–O, illustrates this. Adorno presents the phenomena P and S–O as connected. His configuration contains the concept of praxis, *p*, pertaining to P, and the concepts of subject and object, *s* and *o*, pertaining to S–O. The three concepts are placed around the two phenomena in such a way that each phenomenon is elucidated through the concepts pertaining to the other. Adorno begins by exploring P with reference to the categories *s* and *o*. Where the subject's experience of the object is distorted and subjects do not gain the insights into material conditions necessary for its transformation, praxis is damaged and relegated to pseudo-activity (CM 259–61, 265–6). Adorno then moves on to tackle S–O in terms of *p*. Where praxis is no longer transformative of

[20] The 'Epilegomena' (CM 245 58) of *Catchwords* comprise 'On Subject and Object', followed by 'Marginalia'. Formally, the texts are very similar, and the former's substantive arguments (see Bernstein 2001: 287 301; Marder 2003; O'Connor 2004) contain many of the counterparts of the theory praxis constellation in terms of subject and object.

present living conditions, these conditions confront the subject as an invariant, distant objectivity. 'The continually resurfacing irrationality of praxis . . . – its aesthetic originary image are the sudden, random actions by which Hamlet realises the plan and fails in the realisation – indefatigably animates the semblance of the absolute division between subject and object' (CM 261).

P is explained through *s* and *o* and thus related to S–O, which is explained through *p* and thus related to P. Instead of reducing one phenomenon to the other, Adorno discusses them as interrelated. The phenomena are not reduced to any one category. No category or set of categories carries greater explanatory weight than the others. For Adorno, examining these issues means coordinating *p*, *s* and *o* as equal in rank. His argumentation remains largely consistent with the rules of inference. Yet reflection does not advance one-sensically as a logical continuum towards a final explanatory concept. Rather, the concepts are interwoven as in a carpet or spider web.

Sociological theory–praxis configuration

'Marginalia' also illuminates the configurative procedure as it operates in Adorno's specifically sociological writing. According to Adorno, the sociological potential of constellations to articulate characteristics of social life and exchange society is threefold: constellations present phenomena in light of their social dimension, express certain characteristics of social reality and work towards revealing society's historical character. 'Marginalia' constitutes an attempt to realise all three objectives.

Presenting integrated elements Two passages from 'Marginalia' can be read as responses to social integration:

(A) 'Thinking is a doing, theory a form of praxis' (CM 261).

(B) 'Praxis without theory . . . must fail . . . False praxis is no praxis' (CM 265).

These perspectives on the theory–praxis relation are established as follows. Social integration renders single phenomena analysable solely in connection with others in society. The 'Marginalia' constellation assembles and interlinks a multitude of concepts – here *theory, praxis, subject* and *object* – to present the theory–praxis relation in view of the properties it has acquired in interrelation with other phenomena – subject and object – in the social whole. Adorno proceeds from his notion that the 'subject, the thinking substance of philosophers', is inseparably part of socio-material reality, 'the object'. In this respect, 'thinking', though 'immanently determined and stringent', is simultaneously a 'real mode of behaviour in the

midst of reality' (CM 261). That is to say, *(A)*: theory is praxis. Adorno qualifies this from the angle of the object. True praxis is not merely *re*productive, but productive of – i.e. a transformative intervention in – objective, socio-material living conditions (CM 262). Correspondingly, theory can be truly practical – strictly, *(A)* can apply – only if theory goes beyond merely reconstructing what is. What theory should this be? Society now determines all objects under the sun, including what must be done to transform them. Therefore true praxis depends on a decipherment of the object's hidden social dimension (CM 265). Theory can tackle this task of discerning 'aspects that might ... lead beyond the ... constraints of the situation. This is of unforeseeable relevance for the relationship of theory and praxis.' For a theory which takes on this indispensable role within truly transformative praxis 'becomes a transformative, practical productive force' itself: *(A)* (CM 264).

'Where one category ... changes', warns *Negative Dialectics*, 'the constellation of all changes and thereby each one in turn' (ND 169). The changes in the concepts of subject and theory and the corresponding changes in the subject–object and theory–praxis constellations have just become manifest. Theory and praxis now relate such that theory, if it takes on the socio-analytical task for transformative purposes, is itself practical. In fact, their relationship is even closer. If true praxis must be transformative, non-transformative praxis is false (pseudo-) praxis. Today, praxis can only be transformative if the object's social dimension is deciphered. This dimension is not immediately transparent. Its decryption *requires* theory. Hence *(B)*: praxis without theory cannot be true praxis at all.

These passages illustrate Adorno's endeavour to employ configurative writing for realising a major objective of the sociological text. By interconnecting the concepts of *theory*, *praxis*, *subject*, and *object* in a constellation, he seeks to investigate theory and praxis in association with other phenomena in the social whole and avoid their illegitimate isolation. The upshots of his investigations are *(A)* and *(B)*: presentations of the theory–praxis relation in view of the characteristics it has acquired in social integration.

Enacting social reality But why does Adorno choose such formulations? Why go on to write *(A)*: 'Theory is a form of praxis', for instance, rather than simply letting *(A*)* summarise the discussion: 'Theory which takes on the analytical task indispensable to transformation is an integral part of praxis'? True, *(A*)* contains more clearly defined categories, which it uses more distinctly. Yet when presenting phenomena in social mediation, Adorno's sociological texts also strive to *express* something of what identification 'cuts off', especially aspects of the social whole

suffusing phenomena. This expressive potential of sociological configuration, discussed with reference to the mimetic moment of language above, can now be illustrated in full.

In comparison with *(A*)*, *(A)* tightens the theory–praxis constellation, presenting theory and praxis as much more closely intertwined. This tightened formulation constitutes Adorno's response to the obstacles to analysing and presenting either theory or praxis independently of the other. It can be read as an articulation of these obstacles. By tightening the theory–praxis constellation, *(A)* conveys the resistance of both phenomena to isolated treatment. This resistance is not identified. Rather, the tightness of *(A) enacts* the obstacles to elementary analysis: the theory–praxis constellation of *(A)* arranges the two concepts so closely that their recalcitrance to separation comes to resemble that of the phenomena themselves. By mimetically enacting these obstacles, *(A)* expresses them. Since the phenomena's recalcitrance to separation is enhanced by their entanglement in conditions of social integration, expressing the obstacles to elementary analysis is tantamount to expressing the close relation of theory and praxis in those conditions. By making itself similar to the tightening web of socialisation, *(A)* expresses one of its properties independently of the identifying category 'integration'. Adorno adds *(A)* to 'Marginalia' because *(A)*, unlike *(A*)*, contributes this dimension to the text's articulation of social reality.

This analytical trajectory yields insights into many puzzling features of Adorno's sociological texts (what I called 'unclear passages' and he calls 'eccentricities'). 'Introduction to the Positivist Dispute in German Sociology' highlights the striking frequency of logical contradictions in his sociological writings:

(a) 'Science would then be autonomous, and yet would not be autonomous' (PD 4).
(b) '[S]ociety is comprehensible and incomprehensible in one' (PD 15).
(c) '[T]he same social system unleashes and leashes the forces of production' (PD 24).
(d) 'Society as subject and society as object are the same and yet not the same' (PD 34).
(e) '[Protocol sentences] are true and are not true' (PD 54).

'Marginalia' contains the following, seemingly flagrant contradiction:

(f) '[T]heory [is] a form of praxis' (CM 261); 'an immediate unity of theory and praxis is hardly possible' (CM 265).

Chapter 3 emphasised that many of Adorno's sociological texts contain scarcely reconcilable, often contradictory assertions on social reality – e.g. the simultaneous assertion and denial of German cultural uniqueness – rather than positive conclusions.

It might be argued, Adorno states, that one could 'translate such contradictions into merely semantic ones', i.e. 'demonstrate that each contradictory sentence refers to something different' (PD 24). Certainly *(b)*, *(c)* and *(d)* articulate problems Adorno elsewhere treats without formulating contradictions. *(b)*, for instance, could be rendered as *(b*)*: 'Insofar as rationality operates in exchange, reasoning subjects can understand it; but insofar as the exchange of equivalents such as labour power for its cost produces inequality and thus defies logic, or insofar as the social process has become quasi-autonomous and solidified vis-à-vis reasoning subjects, they cannot understand it' (see PD 15, PETG 127). *(e*)* could read: 'Protocol sentences are truthful records of empirical observations, but untruthful when inconsistent or for concealing what is hidden beneath the empirical surface'. Translating *(f)*, *(f*)* would involve an explanation of why theory is praxis, e.g. my explanation of statement *(A)* above, followed by numerous qualifications, e.g. that theory cannot fulfil its analytical task if it is coerced into proposing practical solutions. Why, then, insist on writing out contradictory formulations?

'If theorems are contradictory', Adorno explains, 'this need not ... always be the theorems' fault' (PD 26). In other words, even where they break the law of the excluded middle, the contradictions mentioned are not simply logical. For instance, a society which is reproduced by human rationality and can consequently be understood, but is made autonomous as a process defying logic so that subjects cannot understand it, bears within itself two opposing tendencies. These tendencies make society 'contradictory within itself' (PETG 127). Both *(b)* and *(b*)* articulate society's opposing tendencies. But the formulations are not exchangeable; nor is the clearer, more distinct *(b*)* necessarily more precise. The two formulations differ in how they convey society's ensuing contradictoriness. *(b*)* would have to add the identificatory concept 'contradictory', which is really appropriate only to intellectual constructs and therefore inevitably 'cuts' something 'away' when applied to socio-material life. *(b)*, too, responds to society's contradictoriness and can be read as articulating that 'the matter ... is contradictory in itself'. Yet in contradistinction with *(b*)*, *(b)* reacts to society's 'withdraw[al] from non-contradictory logic' (PETG 171) by 'suspend[ing] th[e] concern with non-contradictoriness' (PETG 160). The response to society's contradictoriness in *(b)* is the contradiction written out. *(b)* conveys society's contradictory character by *enacting* rather than identifying it. To Adorno, this makes *(b)* superior to *(b*)*. In its mimetic moment, where it resembles society's contradictoriness, *(b)* expresses society's contradictoriness. *(b)* articulates the same contradictory quality of society intended by the identification *(b*)*, but without superimposing the badly fitting category informing *(b*)*, and

hence without its identifying curtailment. The 'form [of contradictory sentences] . . . expresses the structure of the object more sharply than a procedure which attains scientific satisfaction by turning away from what is unsatisfactory in the extra-scientific object of cognition' (PD 24). 'The dialectical contradiction expresses the real antagonisms which do not become visible within the logical-scientistic system of thought' (PD 26). Adorno contradicts Popper's (1940: 410) conviction that a theory with contradictions is 'useless' because it conveys no 'information'. Adorno deems writing out contradictions an indispensable part of the sociological text's faithful articulation of a contradictory social reality. By the same token, 'theoretical constructs which have non-contradictoriness as their highest measure thus enter into a contradiction with the matter' (PETG 127). '[D]eny[ing] . . . contradictions in the matter' through 'conceptual distinctions and manipulations' is a compromise Adorno (1991a: 109) is unprepared to make.

Contradictions also seem to realise another expressive aim of sociological writing broached earlier. A contradiction, e.g. *(f)*, suggests the subject's failure to elucidate the phenomenon – here the theory–praxis relation in social mediation – in a logically consistent fashion, namely in compliance with the rules of inference guiding the analysis. Yet for Adorno, what 'manifests itself as error' here, to use terms he employs in a slightly different context, might have less to do with the subject's incapacity and more with the 'truth' of the irresolvable (HTS 146–7). The contradiction can be read as a response to, and thus as an articulation of, real obstacles confronting social analysis. The breakdown of logical consistency in *(f)* seems to convey the resistance of social life to being elucidated by means of the subject's inferences. This does not mean that the obstacles to social analysis are conceptually identified. Rather, *(f)*'s own discrepancy with the rules of inference *resembles* social reality's defiance to being elucidated by logical thinking. In other words, the contradiction's contrariness to logic enacts – and thereby mimetically expresses – the resistance to theoretical analysis of the socially entangled theory–praxis relation itself. Society, in turn, is recalcitrant and 'indissoluble' in its 'heteronomous' perpetuation of 'nature', articulated also by Durkheim's *faits* (PD 12). Hence, enacting society's intractability for subjective logical thought by writing out *(f)*, instead of settling with *(f*)*, is tantamount to expressing – instead of merely identifying – the opacity of the solidified condition of exchange society.

Another textual 'eccentricity' of Adorno's is his use of foreign words. The titles 'Marginalia' and 'Dialectical Epilegomena' (the subsection containing 'Marginalia') are Latin and Greek respectively, and the theory–praxis configurations themselves contain a conspicuous amount

of foreign terms and phrases. Adorno uses the Greek *Pseudo-* and *Synonyma* and the Greek derivatives *Antithese* and *Sophistik* as well as the Latin *ad Calendas Graecas* and Latin derivatives *usurpieren*, *Dispens*, *Zession* and *regressiv*. From modern foreign languages, he borrows the French *Nuance*, *malgré lui-même*, *au fond* and *volonté générale*, the English *happenings*, *conditioned reflexes* and *sales resistance*, and the Hungarian derivative *Kandare*. Adorno's audience complained about this aspect of his texts (NLI 185). Their agitation may have been misguided, but for Adorno's interpreters it was fortunate, prompting him to defend his use of foreign words and to explain their sociological potential.

Adorno's defence proceeds from the clear-cut notion that there are passages in a text in which German terms will not do. Benjamin (1996: 476) imagines the writer as a surgeon: 'With the cautious lineaments of handwriting, the operator makes incisions, displaces internal accents, cauterizes proliferations of words, and inserts a foreign word as a silver rib.' '[T]he silver rib', Adorno adds, 'helps the patient, the thought, to live on, while it sickened from the organic rib' (NLII 290). But this defence of foreign words also contains a more complicated argument. Not only are foreign words often more exact concepts, but 'the discrepancy between the foreign word and the language can be made to serve the *expression* of truth' (NLI 189, emphasis added). Adorno insists that the service of foreign words to expression is irreplaceable – that, contra Lazarsfeld, a familiar term cannot 'express everything which the corresponding Latin word can express'.

Adorno would dispute Duden's (1990: 13) *Dictionary of Foreign Words* which I have been consulting in this study. The dictionary generally recommends foreign words only for circumventing 'verbose and incomplete' German, articulating 'gradual differences in content', 'stylistic' variations or syntactic tightening. They should be avoided altogether when they restrict comprehension. Adorno does not claim that foreign words are harmless. He emphasises that they bear significant advantages precisely due to their foreignness: one must not 'deny' their strangeness, 'but . . . use it' (NLII 286); '[o]ne must defend them, where they are at their worst . . .: where they pester the body of language as foreign bodies' (NLII 288). The incomprehensibility of foreign words, Adorno explains, conveys the chasm between reality and familiar concepts (NLI 189–90). Foreign in place of German words are no mere foibles of an intellectual mesmerised by his vocabulary, but a response to, and articulation of, the resistance of an increasingly unfamiliar world to familiar language. This resistance is not identified. Rather, in 'pestering' the 'lingual body' of the organic mother tongue, foreign words come to enact mimetically the foreign world's defiance to the subject's own concepts. Since reality's

foreignness is that of a socially integrated world, 'strange words' (*Fremdwörter*) stage a weighty aspect of exchange society. Here is what sociologists can learn from them:

> The stranger their things have become to humans in society, the stranger the words must be that stand for reaching them, and for allegorically urging that the things be brought home. The more deeply society is cleft by the contradiction between its quasi natural and its rational being the more isolated foreign words must neces sarily remain in the space of language, incomprehensible to one part of humanity, threatening to the other; and yet they have their legitimacy as an expression of estrangement itself. (NLII 289)

This concerns social critique as well. Like contradictions, the scars of logic, foreign words, the 'historical scars on the creaturely body of language' (Adorno 1989: 35), are, as expressions of estrangement, expressions of individual torment in the incomprehensible, threatening reified world. 'Scars', 'body': these are no mere metaphors. For Adorno, all suffering is mediated corporeality.[21] Textual scars stage the wounds inflicted upon subjects by exchange society. Through contradictions and foreign words, woe speaks: 'Go', pressing for humanly produced things to be brought home and for estrangement to fade. Only in a 'society, which names itself along with things' will foreign words be understandable and textual scars be healed (NLII 289–90). Meanwhile, although Lazarsfeld would like to spare his stenographer this, Adorno's readers can physically experience social estrangement, pausing, raising their puzzled head, stretching out their arms and reaching for the dictionary.[22]

Another frequent figure in Adorno's sociological configurations is litotes. Rhetoric names 'double negative' (Cockroft and Cockroft 1992: 133) and 'denial of the contrary' (Lanham 1968: 63) as litotes. Adorno's 'Introduction to the Positivist Dispute' features the following double negative and denial of the contrary:

(g) 'Emphatic cognition does not go over to irrationalism, if it does not absolutely renounce art' (PD 34–5).

(h) '[D]ialectics is not a method independent of its object' (PD 9).

'Marginalia' contains this dazzling denial of the contrary:

[21] This underlines the significance of the suffering body in Adorno's sociology. His concern with *expressing* social suffering led him to qualify one of his most calculated formulations '[t]o write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric' (P 34) with the statement: 'Perennial suffering has as much right to expression as the martyred one to scream; hence, it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz no poem could be written anymore' (ND 355).

[22] Translations (Adorno 1999, CM) which italicise foreign terms Adorno very rarely does so (e.g. ND 259) issue warnings to readers and encroach upon this reading experience.

(i) '[P]raxis does not proceed independently of theory, nor theory independently of praxis' (CM 276).

(i) specifies Adorno's perspective on the theory–praxis interrelation in capitalism.[23] Again, one wonders why he formulates this reticent, negative litotes instead of the more determinate, positive *(i*)*: 'praxis proceeds dependently on theory, theory dependently on praxis'. Adorno does not discuss litotes explicitly, but the following considerations might help elucidate its role in his sociological texts.

'[O]ne cannot think without identification', says Adorno, 'every determination is identification'. The overt 'ideal' of identification is reality's correspondence with its concept (ND 152). Correspondence is articulated as 'X is Y', e.g. *(i*)*, modified for analytical clarity: 'praxis is dependent on theory'. Currently though, 'objects do not go into their concept' (ND 17). Praxis is not exhaustively determined by the concept 'dependent on theory' and the concept intends characteristics that praxis does not have (see ND 153–4). Where thinking encounters this lack of congruence, writing recedes from offering determinate, positive formulations such as 'X is Y'. Thought is compelled to settle momentarily for a denial of the contrary: for denying that non-Y, which contradicts concept Y and would rule out its applicability to X, applies to X. Writing responds to the experience of reality's resistance to determination by 'lessening'; here the less determinate, reticent, negative formulation *(i)*: 'praxis is *not in*dependent of theory'. This unsatisfactory formulation urges the analysis to continue, but not without signposting a potentially fruitful direction. *(i)* conveys how little social reality – theory and praxis in their social dimension – lends itself to conceptual determination. 'Lessened' to negativity and offering the reader minimal graspable content, *(i)* might even be read as enacting, resembling and mimetically expressing social reality's elusiveness to the subject's conceptual grasp, its inscrutability.

Adorno's uses of litotes diverge decisively from general definitions of this figure's rhetorical function. Corbett and Connors's (1999: 404) notion that litotes is used 'to enhance the impressiveness of what we say' contradicts Adorno's effort to harness the potential of expressing the – by the standards of correspondence – unimpressive capacity of identificatory thinking today. Likewise Cockcroft and Cockcroft's (1992: 133) definition of litotes as the figure enabling audiences to deduce that 'the point' could have been put 'infinitely more strongly' and 'conveying powerfully understated confidence', directly contradicts Adorno's efforts to realise the potential of reticently expressing lack of confidence and the inability to

[23] See *(A)* and *(B)* above.

put the point more determinately. The dividing line between Popper and Adorno can also be drawn more sharply here. Popper's (PD 297) list asserts the substitutability of certain of Adorno's formulations – e.g. 'Societal totality does not lead a life of its own over and above that which it unites and of which it, in its turn, is composed' – with simpler ones – e.g. 'Society consists of social relationships'. Popper's translation captures some of the original's meaning. But Adorno might charge him with curtailing the original's expressive dimension. Adorno's formulation is difficult to grasp. Only reticently does it suggest that society consists of relations between individuals, namely by negating that the totality is above such relations. This expresses social reality's resistance to the concept's grasp – notably that society now barely discloses to subjects that its totality consists only of relations between humans. Popper's simpler, more determinate, positive version signals that society is easily deciphered and readily reveals its constituent relations between humans to them. Society's integration into a web resistant to clarification, amplified by Adorno's original formulation, is perfectly muted. From this angle, the two sentences are not equivalent: bad writing – if one wants to call it that – seems necessary.

This is Adorno's conviction. '[C]ertain eccentricities' in his texts, he explains to his publishers, 'are not external to the matter but demanded by [the matter] itself' (Adorno *et al.* 2003: 226). Adorno's sociological constellations seek to face up to their socially conditioned obstacles. The ensuing formulations assist the sociological text in articulating these obstacles. By kindling the mimetic moment of language, sociological writing attempts to surpass its reliance on 'overstrained categories' and to develop the potential to express specific aspects of social phenomena – such as social contradictions – as well as major tendencies in exchange society, especially its integrated, petrified condition.[24]

Theory–praxis re*configuration* I indicated that problematic passages expressing society's resistance to clarification and appearance as opaque nature are both instructive and misleading: instructive because they express society's estranged, densely integrated galvanisation, which must otherwise be designated by 'overstrained' identificatory categories; misleading because even in its petrifaction, society is a human, historical

[24] Explaining Adorno's sociology, including his use of *alternative* formulations, has required me to use overstrained categories 'estrangement', 'integration' etc. abundantly. I admit to having repeatedly 'cut' something 'away'. But the commentator, unable merely to 'paste the textual substrate' into the commentary, depends on these categories to an extent.

product. This dilemma affects, for instance, contradictory passages like *(f)* in 'Marginalia': theory is praxis but the two are not one. Such unclear passages, Adorno demands, must be *re*configured in ever new attempts to properly decrypt and present the phenomena – here the theory–praxis relation in social mediation – as historical phenomena understandable by the humans that created them. 'Logic ... and method ... has the obligation to grasp ... logical contradiction', the 'inapplicability of identically retained categories to a manifold material', and to make 'alogicality ... comprehensible' (PETG 160–1).[25]

So as to further scrutinise the *separation* of theory and praxis, Adorno rearranges the two concepts and relates them to two historical categories: the 'divergence between theory and praxis' must be traced 'back to the oldest division between *physical* and *intellectual labor*'. As long as a spiritual *ordo* guided human thought and action – until the Middle Ages – the theory–praxis separation, Adorno argues, remained largely unconsidered. Once that order and its 'practical guidelines' had collapsed in the Renaissance, it became obvious that theory did not provide immediate instructions for action. The formal, abstract character of practical enlightenment reason continued to reflect this (CM 262, emphases added). Today, the theory–praxis separation still bears at least three elements of truth. Firstly, a theory seeking to pursue its socio-analytical aim freely must not force itself to answer to demands for practical advice (CM 276). Secondly, praxis remains associated with the negative connotations of physical labour's agonising effort in the struggle for survival (CM 262); whereas theory is associated with the privilege of those who, free from 'material labour ... like Nietzsche's [2005: 9] Zarathustra, take pleasure in their intellect'. Thirdly, although every 'intellect presupposes material labor for its own existence' – the privileged live on the labour of others in exploitative exchange relations – the privilege also inspires a utopian idea. Given the painful, coercive strain of praxis, the 'goal of right praxis would be its own abolition', especially now that 'the technical productive forces are at a stage that makes the universal dispensation from material labor, its reduction to a limit value, foreseeable' (CM 266–7).[26]

[25] His 'disdain for traditional logic', writes Jay (1984b: 266), 'allowed Adorno to hold ... incompatible positions simultaneously without worrying about their coherence'. Yet Adorno only opposes Popper's (1940: 407) dictate to *avoid*, not Popper's 'reluctance to accept', contradictions. Contradictions have expressive potential, but as expressions of social reality they are as instructive as they are worrying, as far as Adorno is concerned.

[26] Labour's 'woe speaks: Go', Adorno refuses to replace the utopian ideal of freedom from the plight of labour with the omnipresent 'ideal of full employment' (1999: 319, see also 1961: 47). His utopian hint is consistent with previous ones, naming a precondition for abolishing suffering.

Adorno's reconfiguration of the theory–praxis constellation also aims to elucidate theory *as* praxis historically. Where theory deciphers socio-material reality and indicates possibilities for true transformative praxis, theory, Adorno argued above, plays a vital part in praxis – is itself practical. This is true of 'the primitive who contemplates how he can protect his small fire from the rain or where he can find shelter from the storm' as much as of 'the enlightener who construes how humanity can escape its self-incurred tutelage through its interest in self-preservation' (CM 264–5). Adorno refers to Kant here, but not without adding that whenever his own work contributed to dismantling ideology and fostered 'a certain movement toward ... maturity', it also had 'some practical influence' (CM 277–8).

In such *re*configurations, the contradictory character of phenomena and the difficulties with fully deciphering the coagulated social whole are never entirely overcome. This would require social transformations to crush society's resistance to analysis. A certain degree of 'unclearness' therefore prevails in sociological writing. 'Marginalia' provides no conclusion on theory and praxis towards which the text progresses in a process of steadily growing clarification. Adorno rearranges the two contradictory statements comprised by *(f)* and further illuminates the theory–praxis relation. But the contradiction is not wholly resolved and the reality at issue not entirely deciphered. Theory must remain autonomous, cannot be forced to meet practical purposes; but at the same time 'praxis does not proceed independently of theory, nor theory independently of praxis'. Adorno neither refutes that theory and praxis are separate, nor that theory is a form of praxis. Rather: 'If theory and praxis are neither immediately one nor absolutely different, then their relation is one of discontinuity' (CM 276). Adorno's sociological reflections cited in Chapter 3 never let the investigations come to a final rest. Similarly, the 'Marginalia' constellation, unable to provide conclusions on the theory–praxis relation in capitalism, alternates between unclear passages expressing the contradictoriness of the phenomenon and the social conditions infringing on thinking it, and reconfigurative attempts to decipher the matter historically in resistance to the notion that what is social is inscrutable by nature. Vis-à-vis the task of analysing and articulating as complex and recalcitrant a social reality as the capitalist condition, this, Adorno warns his sociology students, is the only viable path for sociological writing.

If you ask me what I actually understand by method here ... I would say that method consists precisely in that, on the one hand, one certainly ... does not put reality's alogical or antilogical moments contradicting each other ... in order, as it would comply with the categories of formal logic[. B]ut ... on the other hand, [it also pertains to method that] one does ... seek to grasp in one's thinking these

contradictions or deviations from formal logic, and . . . one is thereby certainly in turn directed to a kind of higher non contradictoriness. (PETG 161)

I noted that Adorno draws parallels between art and theoretical language. Here the sociologist, ever critical of the division of intellectual labour, negotiates – if only for a moment – the boundaries between art and social science. What he says of the 'mimetic' and 'constructive moments' in modern artworks seems to apply equally to the twofold endeavour of his sociological text to make itself similar to the solidified condition and yet to drive interpretation forward to avoid misrecognition. '[E]xpression is the negativity of suffering, construction is the attempt to withstand the suffering of estrangement by exceeding [estrangement] in the horizon of undiminished and thus no longer violent rationality' (1999: 257). Sociological writing of this kind testifies to the discipline's double character.

6 Sociology and the non-social

For Adorno, the possibilities to examine, criticise, transform and write about exchange society are shaped by the problems society creates for sociology. Social integration has proven a particularly extensive predicament. Socialisation affects even the minutest aspects of intellectual and material life. Empirical material, albeit sociologically indispensable, is untrustworthy because the social dimension it develops in integration is not immediately discernible. Only theoretical reflection can decipher the material, but faces immense obstacles when trying to unravel fully the dense web of the totally socialised society cocooning single phenomena. The socialisation of concepts and actions creates problems for social critique and praxis, and society's omnipresence and petrifaction generate quandaries for sociological writing. Adorno sounds thoroughly convinced that there is no longer anything that is not integrated in exchange society.

Surely, though, this would amount to one of those unambiguous verdicts on society Adorno sees as out of sociology's reach. Indeed, whereas earlier he was shown to state that society lets nothing escape, his sociology lectures confirm this only very nearly: '"Society" . . . constitutes a certain kind of intertwinement which, as it were [gewissermaßen], leaves nothing out'. *Gewissermaßen* – literally: to a certain degree – sends a signal muted by the official translation, from which the word has been deleted (IS 30). Adorno momentarily hesitates to assert to his students that his notion of total integration is as conclusive as it appears in many of his sociological writings.

Adorno's hesitations are stimulated by impulses from another area of his *oeuvre*. These impulses compel sociology to question its far-reaching thesis of total socialisation. Are there not still elements of a world that has *eluded* exchange society? Is it still possible to *experience* such elements? The concepts and arguments informing Adorno's response to these questions involve some of his most complex thinking and strongly resist point-by-point exposition. No matter how much one tries to contain this problem, it will sometimes be necessary to state an idea without reasoning it through until others become clearer, to press a point before suddenly turning in a

different direction, or to repeat thoughts from various angles. Nonetheless, this dimension of Adorno's work, too, can be clarified through illustration, although at first the minuscule fragments that thus come into focus seem unlikely sources for his thoughts on the weighty questions raised here. Adorno's reply – I may as well say it now – yields no definitive answer. What it contains are arguments on exchange society and its examination which add perplexingly to the aspects of his sociology discussed so far.

Colours, grey

Like earlier themes, the last theme of this sociological study cannot be contained within sociology's boundaries. Adorno's response to the questions raised here surfaces from his work on a discipline traditionally concerned with 'last things' – metaphysics (MCP 1) – and culminates in points of contact between metaphysics and sociology. Before this trajectory can be traced, it is necessary to introduce the problem of metaphysical experience with reference to Adorno's critique of metaphysics. In relation to metaphysical experience, Adorno occasionally alludes to colourful traces of life that are not subject to exchange society and addresses the question of experiencing them. However, he does not often persevere with these traces. Sociological arguments, too, resurface in this context. In Adorno's critique and negation of putative experiences of a reality outside of exchange society, his work on metaphysics and his sociological examinations of exchange society intersect in two intriguing respects.[1]

Critique of metaphysics

Adorno treats metaphysics as the discipline traditionally concerned with an essential, fundamental world beyond the world encountered by individuals (PTII 162–8): with 'transcendence' beyond 'immanence' (MCP 2–3).[2] The events of the twentieth century, he argues, have delegitimised the core projects of metaphysics: the construction of transcendence as an intellectual principle and its positive assertion. It is impossible to do

[1] Adorno's writings on metaphysics have been discussed more elaborately by other com mentators (Bernstein 1997, 2001: 371 456; Finke 1999; Hearfield 2004: 156 71; Jameson 1990: 111 20; Rosiek 2000; Tassone 2004; Wellmer 2000: 183 202; 2005).

[2] Evoking Nietzsche's *Hinterweltler*, 'backworld folk', a play on the American 'backwoods folk', *Hinterwäldler*, Adorno clarifies: 'This mode of thinking pictures behind the world a second, hidden world, or constructs it' (PTII 162). Nietzsche's Zarathustra (2005: 27 9) inveighs against the heavenly backworld as an invention of deluded humans despairing of earthly suffering.

justice to Adorno's ideas on 'transcendence' here, but broaching some of these ideas is indispensable for introducing the problem of metaphysical experience.

Adorno's critique of metaphysics diverges from much of his philosophical work in that the 'method' (MCP 99) of disclosing internal flaws of philosophical reasoning – familiar, for instance, from his Husserl critique – does not inform his approach here, at least not throughout. What is important is that the unspeakable Holocaust, impacting on the suffering body, once more forces its way brutally into the tortured subject's thinking. Auschwitz, Adorno presses, has highlighted the illegitimacy of the – metaphysically decisive (MCP 4–5, 98–9, 120, PTII 163) – separation of transcendental truth as intellectual essence from spatio-temporal reality, its construction in pure thinking. Auschwitz explodes the idea that inner-worldly, historical reality is irrelevant to questions of transcendence. No*body* – no 'torturable body' whose 'physical feeling' can 'identif[y] with unbearable suffering' – can deny that socio-material reality is important to enquiries into absolute truth (MCP 100–2, 116–17, ND 354). 'And those who continue to engage in old-style metaphysics, . . . regarding [what has happened] as beneath the dignity of metaphysics, like everything merely earthly and human, . . . prove themselves inhuman' (MCP 101). Questions of material existence – Can one still live after Auschwitz? – matter (MCP 110, ND 357–8).

The impact of Auschwitz sabotages the metaphysical endeavour to assert transcendence positively in terms of two intertwined principles: εἶδος (*eidos*), the order of essences, higher truth and meaning underlying the world (MCP 39, 61–2, 149n3), and τέλος (*telos*), the world's final purpose or sublime destiny, the ultimate state of goodness towards which all events essentially urge (MCP 62–3, 83–4, 95–6). Once Auschwitz is considered – and it simply cannot be avoided – there can be no justification for declaring an εἶδος of the world. For what supreme idea, what higher truth could be held to underpin the victims' unfathomable agony? What sublime meaning could be said to invest the 'permanent institution' of 'torture', concentration camps and nuclear weapons? Asserting a magnificent principle governing the world capable of all this, maintaining that the suffering must have made some sense, amounts at best to its ideological affirmation; worse, to its unwitting moderation; and worse still, to a mockery of the millions senselessly reduced to cinders (MCP 101–5). If the 1755 Lisbon earthquake inspired Voltaire's *Poème* – 'I can no longer conceive how all would be well' (1911: 4) – the 'real hell' of recent 'human evil' confirms, with infinitely stronger reverberations, the irreconcilability of 'metaphysical thought' and historical experience (ND 354, see also MCP 105–11).

The positive assertion of a τέλος for the world, the statement that it is en route to a supreme destiny, is now equally illegitimate (MCP 101–2). For such a declaration would belittle what happened as a mere stage on the world's discernible course to goodness – as indefensible a position as the notion that it made sense. 'Millions of Jews have been murdered, and this is to be seen as an interlude and not the catastrophe itself' (MM 55, see also HF 4). Surely, 'Auschwitz has irrefutably proven the failure of culture' (ND 359). This affects also 'the idea of the historical totality as one of calculable economic necessity' (ND 317). Along with rejecting a positive τέλος, Adorno rebuffs Marx and Engels's contention that the primacy of the economy in history guarantees its 'happy end' as unjustified metaphysics, a 'deification of history'. One can retrace universal history from 'slingshot to . . . megabomb', but not anticipate the passage from 'savage to humanity'. 'The assertion of a world plan for the better, which manifests itself in history and encompasses it, would be, after the catastrophes and in the face of future ones, cynical' (ND 314–15).

Reminiscent of his socio-critical project and his new moral, sociological and educational imperatives, Adorno's critique of metaphysics bears an influential physical dimension, which was severely shaken by Auschwitz. Auschwitz fiercely robs all attempts to envision transcendental truth in disregard for socio-material reality of their legitimacy and prohibits (MCP 114) any positive statement of transcendence – be it sublime meaning, be it a world plan for the better. 'The somatic layer of the living, distant from meaning, is the scene of suffering, which burned everything assuaging of *Geist* and its objectification, culture, without consolation in the camps' (ND 358). Pursuing metaphysics in its traditional terms would mean ridiculing the calamity, violating the idea of truth and, ultimately, lunacy (MCP 121–3).

Notwithstanding his scathing critique, Adorno also negates a position opposing those he has just rejected: the nihilist avowal that the world is inherently meaningless, that subjects must refrain from thinking about transcendence *tout court* and settle with immanence. Asserting positive sense is now unjustifiable. 'If someone in despair, who wants to kill himself, asks someone who is talking him out of it, what the meaning of life is, then the helpless helper will be unable to name him one; as soon as he tries, he is to be refuted'. But the impossibility of stating transcendence does not yet necessitate its expulsion from thought. Rather, nihilism itself is unsustainable. The helper replying 'life has no meaning' is silenced by the counter question: why are you still alive then (ND 369–70)? Moreover, believing in nothing is nonsense: 'the something . . . meant by the word belief is, according to its own meaning, no nothing' (ND 372). The 'thesis that life has [no meaning] would, as a positive one, be just as

foolish as its opposite [the construction and assertion of life's meaning] is false' (ND 370).

Adorno refuses to be barred from thinking about transcendence and its possible experience. He challenges Kant's averment that humans are trapped within fixed cognitive and experiential restrictions, arguing that experiential capacities can change in confrontation with reality. Even if Kant's 'block' hints at the limits of experience and their appearance to individuals in the current social conditions, these are not intrinsic, invariant limits (ND 378–82).[3] Similarly, Adorno refutes positivist verdicts that metaphysics is meaningless or empty because its statements escape all attempts at empirical verification. Presently, Adorno admits, immanence (here meaning factual material) might seem to be all one may think and speak of (MCP 114). But positivism falsely accepts the present limitations of experience – and the historical conditions generating them – as immutable. The bourgeoisie affirms its own entrapment (ND 375, see also 395).

Adorno endorses metaphysics whenever it counters such affirmation and attempts – against Wittgenstein's (1961: 7) position – to think more than what 'is the case'. Metaphysics rightly rejects empirically given immanence as the truth, investigating what lies beyond it (MCP 2–3, 6, PTII 162–3, 167–8). The construction and assertion of transcendence is now interdicted. Yet this does not mean that one must surrender all attempts to think about transcendence, however delicate such attempts may be today. Echoing his interventions against the notion of fixed experiential boundaries, Adorno explores the question of transcendence as the content of a possible metaphysical experience.

Experience of the outside

By problematising the possibility of a metaphysical experience of transcendence, Adorno also begins to reply to the specific questions of this chapter. Are there still vestiges of a non-social world? And even if so, can thinking, experiencing subjects, including sociologists concerned with society, relate to these vestiges? Adorno's answers here seem to be in the affirmative – allusively so, but in the affirmative all the same.

Colourful traces Capitalist integration has made sure that 'immanence' – historical-material reality – is now the 'inescapably dense web' of 'socialised society' (ND 362). Society, governed by exchange relations

[3] On Adorno's Kant critique, see Bernstein 1997: 187 92; 2001: 431 7; Rosiek 2000: 322 35; and Wellmer 2000: 183 91.

which make everything singular equivalent and dequalify life, is covering the world in omnipresent grey. Society's ever-same is grey (CM 260). In the context of his critique of 'nihilism', rebuffing what he calls 'total determinism', Adorno states: 'Consciousness could not despair over the grey at all, if it did not cherish the concept of a different colour', of its reappearance one day in a world different from ours. Yet to this latter sentence Adorno also adds a separate point, irreducible to an argument about imagining a potential future: 'the scattered trace of which [different colour] is not missing *in* the negative whole' (ND 370, emphasis added). The significance of this addendum is easily overlooked. Coming out of nowhere, it is buried in a relative clause, as though it did not challenge a thesis suffusing the best part of Adorno's sociological writings. The relative clause appears to indicate the presence, here and now, of traces that have not been subsumed by society's grey. Elsewhere Adorno mentions 'remnants of life' (MCP 144), moments when 'life for once shows similarity with life and is not . . . kept going solely for the sake of production and consumption' (ND 369), 'fulfilled moments . . . in this world's existence' (ND 371). There are still ruptures which 'give the lie to identity' (ND 396). Thus it seems that integration and fungibility are not total; that elements of a world eluding the grey of exchange society have survived and are a reality today.

Again, Adorno's notion of transcendence is not at issue here, but it is helpful to pinpoint the relationship between those ruptures and transcendence.[4] Experiences of colourful traces in immanence, Adorno warns, cannot vouch for 'the presence of a transcendental' (ND 369). However, every encounter of this kind deals nihilism a blow insofar as in everything that is 'experienced as living' – and only there – the *promise* of 'something transcending life' flares up (MCP 145). Fleeting experiences of fissures in the grey of exchange promise the 'other' (ND 396).

It is possible to specify a further characteristic of those colourful vestiges. 'The concept of meaning', Adorno argues, 'involves objectivity beyond all making; as something made it is already fiction, duplicates the subject, be it ever so collective, and swindles it out of what it appears to grant. Metaphysics is about something objective' (ND 369). Similarly, elements of reality can only have escaped exchange society if they have eluded interventions by contemporary human action. Since human action alone maintains exchange society, what eludes present human intervention also evades exchange; and since the social whole determines all

[4] In his moral philosophical work, Bernstein (2001: 437 51) discusses the transcendental promise of Adorno's 'fugitives' from 'social determination' as the promise of 'fugitive ethical events'.

human activity, non-social traces of life must be objective, escaping socially reproductive human action.

The brevity of these considerations reflects the brevity, rarity and inconspicuousness of Adorno's concessions that tiny traces of a reality outside capitalist exchange and its constitutive human actions have survived. Following the previous chapter's lead on mimetic writing, the brevity of Adorno's hints expresses the rarity and inconspicuousness of those traces themselves. Nonetheless, his hints are strong enough to raise momentary doubts about the claim, emerging so emphatically from his sociological writings, that 'society', which 'does not tolerate anything qualitatively different' (PD 39), is total: that nothing under the sun is now not socialised in exchange.

Individuation Thus the question of how non-social reality traces can be experienced temporarily overrides the otherwise predominant problem of examining exchange society. In Adorno's thinking, the question of fleetingly glimpsing such traces is inseparable from that of metaphysical experience. This is because in metaphysical experiences *qua* genuine experiences of truly alive, fulfilled instants, the promise of transcendence glimmers (ND 366–71). Only a genuine experience of the colourful fissures in identity is capable of receiving, as metaphysical experience, the promise of transcendence. What Adorno discusses as the 'condition of the possibility of ... metaphysical experience' (MCP 141) of promised transcendence is simultaneously that of genuine experiences of a reality that has eluded exchange society. From Adorno's meditations on the former preconditions, the latter can be distilled.

So-called 'originary experiences' (*Urerlebnisse*), i.e. attempts to reach beyond immanence by employing supposedly pure categories, constitute no adequate mode of metaphysical experience. Originary encounters, Adorno contends, simply 'deny the relationship of their ostensibly pure categories to social content' (ND 361). Their concepts are socially determined (MCP 129–30, 136–9). Hence putatively originary experiences cannot reach beyond society to realise metaphysical experience. The lineaments of Adorno's alternative vision of metaphysical experience – and hence the preconditions of a genuine experience of the inexchangeable – lie encrypted in the following image of a fleeting encounter from his childhood:

> What metaphysical experience is, is, to him who disdains reducing it to supposedly originary religious experiences, most likely represented as it is to Proust, in the happiness, perhaps, which names of villages such as Otterbach, Watterbach, Reuenthal, Monbrunn are promising. One believes if one goes there, then one would be in the fulfilled, as though it existed. (ND 366)

Concisely stated, this encounter actualises an individuating mode of experience: it renounces universally applied, identifying, classifying concepts; refuses to make everything the same, equivalent, exchangeable (cf. ND 174); and maintains a high level of openness vis-à-vis the specific element of objective reality experienced.[5]

The child is 'enraptured in this one place, without leering at the universal'. To him 'it is self-evident that what delights him about his favourite little town can be found only there, all alone and nowhere else'. The experiential object is 'absolutely, insolubly individuated' (ND 366). The encounter resists exchange society's identifying procedures, the subsumption of the object under universal concepts which would render it equivalent with others. The child focuses openly on the particular singularity in its specificity. Relinquishing familiar identificatory categories in experiential openness, Adorno admits, entails forfeiting all cognitive security. Experience might 'completely miss the mark' (MCP 141). Indeed, the child, overcome by desire and yearning, errs in thinking that enthralment is only possible in one little town. Yet his 'error constitutes the model of experience, of a concept which would finally be that of the thing itself' (ND 366). For only on condition of experiential 'openness, as that which is not yet subsumed under the identity of the concept', on condition of risking 'fallibility' in uncompromising individuation (MCP 141), is it possible to experience the singular, non-fungible element faithfully, rather than distorting it as something exchangeable. Proust's writings reflect this mode of experience. '[R]esist[ing] the ... mechanization of his own thought', keeping 'faith with the childhood potential for unimpaired experience', he 'perceived the world in as undeformed a manner as on the first day' (NLII 315–16, see also ND 371).[6]

Adorno reiterates the preconditions for experiencing non-social reality traces with reference to the 'infinitely deep constellation between metaphysical experience and happiness' (MCP 140). '[A]mid universal fungibility', he argues, 'happiness clings without exception to the non-fungible' (MM 120). A truly happy experiential engagement with the non-fungible must individuate it: 'only in one specific place' – the child will not be told otherwise – 'can one have the experience of happiness, that of the inexchangeable' (OL 305). Such experiences discard familiar categories. They constitute 'flashes of fallible consciousness' (MCP 142). Conceptual

[5] Bernstein (2001: 427 8) maps Adorno's notion of 'individuation' required for 'metaphysical experience' onto his own notion of the 'complex concept'. The village names 'promis[e] ... an encounter with a sensuous particular ... in its own right'. On Adorno's image, see also Tassone 2004: 361.

[6] On Adorno and Proust, see Rosiek 2000: 337 40.

closure, identification and classification are avoided. '[A]ll happiness of truth' emerges from '[n]on-violent contemplation', never from the 'unhappy generality' of the 'sovereignty of thought' (MM 89–90).

'[N]o-one who is happy can *know* that he is so . . . He who says he *is* happy . . . sins against [happiness]' (MM 112, emphases added). A genuine experience of happiness cannot identify happiness. Consciousness can be close to happiness exclusively from a distance (MM 90). '[H]e . . . who says: I *was* happy' is loyal to happiness (MM 112, emphasis added). Similarly, the child experiences happiness in anticipation: that if he went to the village, he *would* be 'inside the fulfilled'. Once he gets there, in turn, 'the promised recedes like the rainbow. Still, one is not disappointed; one rather feels that now one would be too close and hence one would not see it' (ND 366). The happiness of remembering or anticipating happiness, like the absence of disappointment over the failure to grasp happiness, shows that a genuinely happy experience is sustainable only on condition that happiness is not pinned down. The happy human cannot have a 'standpoint towards' happiness: 'happiness . . . is the interior of objects as something simultaneously remote from them' (MCP 140).

These ideas can be illustrated further in view of the notion that the inexchangeable must have escaped human activity entangled in capitalist social relations. Only a world humanly created and reducible to human activity throughout could ever be identified and resolved by human concepts. A faithful experience of traces of the world foreign to human intervention and its exchange society will leave an unidentified, unresolved, *dinghaft* – not merely thing-like but objective, thing*ly* – remainder. This renders such experiences 'fallible and unavoidably problematic' (MCP 141–3). Yet the refusal to 'annex' as identical to the concept what is not like the human, but 'strange' and 'non-identi[cal]', marks its genuine experience. The demand that the child resolve the object of experience in identification would be a mark of hostility towards the 'other'. Experiencing elements outside of exchange society means maintaining one's 'love' for a beautiful stranger, for the 'distant and different', rather than forcing it to come home in identification (ND 191–2). '[P]henomena in their most concrete form . . . have the colour . . . children focus upon' (HF 138).[7]

[7] Many of Adorno's ideas on experiences of the inexchangeable form part of his writings on metaphysical experience. What is left of metaphysical experience is now concentrated in individuating encounters of colourful traces. But he immediately warns that metaphysical experience is becoming 'paler'. Encounters of 'residues' of life escaping exchange society are fleeting and ephemeral and merely *promise* transcendence; the residues cannot be *taken for* the 'absolute', as *proof* of meaning (ND 368, 371, see also MCP 144 5). Three motifs Adorno assembles them in one sentence delimit the metaphysical significance of the

What emerges from the image of the child's enticed encounters with village names is Adorno's delineation of the preconditions (see also MCP 142) for faithfully experiencing traces of the world which have evaded exchange society. Individuation is essential: it combines a degree of defiance to intellectual socialisation and generalisation – to identification by means of universally applied classifications – with a high level of experiential openness vis-à-vis the singularity in its particularity. 'Inextinguishable in the resistance against the fungible world of exchange is that of the eye which does not want the colours of the world to be annihilated' (ND 396–7), which refuses to see in the specific and different only the equivalent.

Impending closure

These thoughts diverge from some of Adorno's most lingering sociological convictions engaging earlier chapters of this book. His otherwise adamant conception of the totally socialised, administered world is momentarily unsettled. Rarely and allusively, to be sure, but also non-negligibly, does Adorno indicate vestiges of a reality which is not completely entangled in production and consumption and the possibility of experiencing those vestiges. There still appears to be a non-social world to which the subject can relate in a specific way. However, Adorno's allusions do not exhaust his discussion of these issues. Reintroducing some of his sociological arguments warrants serious concerns. Capitalism renders experiences of a reality outside of exchange ever more unreliable and unlikely. Thinking is increasingly required to critically probe and negate ostensible encounters with ruptures in identity. Adorno's responses to the questions of this chapter proceed from allusive affirmation towards negation.

'The context of blinding, which encompasses all humans', Adorno emphasises, 'has a share also in what they envisage to tear the veil with' (ND 364). Exchange society creates more and more obstacles to meeting the *subjective* preconditions for faithful experiences of the inexchangeable. Social integration involves the socialisation of consciousness into identity

fleeting experiences: metaphysical experience 'is maintained *negatively* in that *Is that really all?* which comes closest to being actualised in *waiting in vain*' (ND 368, emphases added; see also MCP 143 4). The experience of promised transcendence is so slight, 'negatively' conveys, that all it provides is a negation of the conclusion that all thoughts of tran scendence must be discarded. The experience of the promise kindles doubts about the view that present immanence is all one may think of, permitting the question if this is really all. Counter to the notion of finalised, omnipresent immanence, the experience of the promise of transcendence suggests that one may still wait (*warten*), although such waiting is like waiting in vain, as one cannot expect (*erwarten*) anything.

thinking. The resistance of experience to universally available, generalising categories which make the singular equivalent and the strange identical is progressively undermined. The capacity to receive reality as sensitively to its specificity as in the image above is fading. '[E]very somewhat sheltered child whose responsiveness has not been driven out of him in his earliest years has ... infinite possibilities of experience ... But this capacity [of Proustian observation] gets lost ... The coercion to adapt prohibits one from listening to reality, from taking its soundings, with such precision'. Susceptible to the mechanisation of thought, 'we' – a rare pronoun in Adorno's work – 'are no longer capable of' such reactions (NLII 315–16). 'We' underlines the subject's resorting to a collectively sanctioned stock of classifications and highlights that Adorno includes himself.

Capitalist integration further depletes putative experiences of traces that have eluded exchange society by seizing ever more of *objective* reality. '[E]xchange society' endeavours 'to plug the last holes that the commodity world still left open' (ND 363). Every element of objective reality is eventually entangled in the web of exchange relations and mutual fungibility of the totally socialised society. Awaiting us is the 'complete reification of the world, where there is nothing left that has not been made by humans' (NLI 245).

As socialisation renders subjects incapable of genuine experiences and wipes out the world of non-fungible singularities, the actual occurrence of encounters with a reality outside of society is ever less likely. '[T]he possibility of metaphysical experience is becoming ... more desultory' (MCP 143), more jumping, wavering, unsteady. For this is the dawn of 'total mediation', in which '[n]othing that would be outside appears to me to be outside', and in which 'it has ceased *to be* what is outside' (HF 121); in which nothing under the sun – nothing in the subject, nothing in the object – can escape capitalist social relations any more.

Hence putatively genuine experiences are increasingly open to scrutiny. 'In place of the Kantian epistemological question, how metaphysics is possible, steps the historico-philosophical one, whether metaphysical experience is still possible at all' (ND 364–5). The only answer to ostensible experiences of a world evading exchange which are hindered from achieving individuation and hit upon an integrated, frozen world is negation. This point is twofold. Firstly, negation truthfully reveals that the experience is not, and does not yield, what it initially seemed to be and yield. Secondly, non-identity thinking may be seen to strive for an intellectual operation still honouring the subjective conditions for genuine experience. Whereas in capitalist integration, immediate encounters tend to employ universal identifying concepts, the *raison d'être* of non-identity

thinking is to dismantle such concepts as untrustworthy. Critical thought strives for experiential openness (see also MCP 68), namely through disassembling the classificatory framework preventing close proximity to the object. 'The absolute . . ., as metaphysics has it in mind, would be the non-identical, which would step forward only after the identity compulsion dwindles' (ND 398).

The trajectory of such critical negations is manifest in Adorno's remarks on the experience of death. For Heidegger (1962: 277–311), authentic 'being-towards-death' – as opposed to the quotidian, inauthentic relationship with death – plays a privileged role in relating to the wholeness of being. Adorno rejects Heidegger's proposal to ascertain the essence of human existence through the experience of death (MCP 107). Heidegger's project unsuccessfully conceals both its employment of a stock of socially available categories and the impact of exchange society on dying and death. Adorno's argument will become clearer shortly. Importantly here, since social integration has seized the subjective experience of death, preventing 'authentic' encounters, and is increasingly affecting the object, death, itself, the experience of death cannot amount to a genuine experience of a reality outside of exchange society. Heidegger's proposal is negated: 'Even the experience of death does not suffice as something final and undoubted, as metaphysics' (ND 361).

For Adorno, Beckett's dramatic work is 'the only really relevant metaphysical production since the war' (MCP 117). Beckett hauntingly stages the relationship between 'dying today' and the problem of evading society. The desperate longing of many of Beckett's *dramatis personae*, Adorno argues, has shrunk to one vision: 'all yearning strives for . . . death – face to face with life, which is nothing but infinite suffering' (Adorno *et al.* 1994: 81, see also NLI 269–70). Of death is expected the escape from the unbearable condition. 'That nothing is any more, is dawning as sole hope'. But Beckett 'dismisses it, too' (ND 373). Heidegger's antipode foments Adorno's doubts about the experience of death. For Beckett, death is no way out. Instead, Beckett fills the stage with the 'extreme . . . sadness' emanating from people's failure to die the longed for death (Adorno *et al.* 1994: 81–2; see also NLI 269). 'World without end Amen', proclaims Winnie at the outset of *Happy Days* (Beckett 1990: 138). To speak of dying, a day's end or going by is 'to speak in the old style' (1990: 145–7). Before the curtain falls on *Endgame*, Clov announces: 'This is what we call making an exit' (1990: 132). '[T]he servant . . . wishes . . . to break out' – 'in vain' (Adorno 1999: 82). '[D]ressed for the road. Panama hat, tweed coat, raincoat over his arm, umbrella, bag. He halts by the door and stands there, impassive and motionless . . .' (Beckett 1990: 132–3).

Sociological intersections

Catchwords mentions 'what has not been maimed by exchange' only to retract immediately: 'there is nothing left unmaimed' (CM 253). Adorno's reply to the questions of this chapter – Is there still a reality evading socialisation? Can one still experience it? – follows a trajectory from allusive affirmation to negation, neither of which he settles with. Some passages refer to faithful glimpses of colourful elements of the inexchangeable. Others warn of the imminence of total mediation, which renders ever more ostensible encounters with a reality escaping exchange society prone to critique. In the context of Adorno's critique and negation of putative experiences of traces of a non-social world, his ideas on metaphysics intersect with his sociological project.

Death and entanglement Adorno scrutinises ostensible experiences of a world outside of exchange society asking whether they meet the conditions outlined earlier. If experiences fail to fulfil them, their appearance as genuine encounters with the inexchangable is negated. Consistent with his warning that the imminence of total mediation makes critical examination necessary, Adorno's negations are informed by his recognition of the *social* obstacles to such encounters, the social conditions which enwrap subjective consciousness and the objective world and thus infringe upon the subject's relationship with non-socialised reality. Adorno's critique of the experience of death demonstrates this. He refuses to trust in the experience of death, arguing that in the current social conditions, this experience fulfils neither the subjective nor the objective preconditions for genuinely encountering the non-fungible. Spotlighting the obstructing and denying social conditions, the critique and negation of putative experiences of a world *outside* exchange society contributes to the sociological analysis and critique *of* exchange society.

Adorno dismisses the experience of death partly because *subjects* fail to have genuine experiences. This failure is conditioned by social integration, which imposes generalising categories on experience. One manifestation of this is the formulaic treatment of death in death statistics and as an insurance case: the individual event is subsumed under a number of 'incidents' and made exchangeable for the payout, without any concern for the 'particular case' (DE 66). This sober perception of death as a 'domesticated' occurrence, illustrated also by the 'comic[al]' portrayal of death in popular culture, discloses the socialisation of death experience into capitalism's identifying thought processes. Where everyone is regarded – and made – commensurable and replaceable in their accomplishment of social functions, the subject sees the deaths of commensurable people, a series of

commensurable deaths, and in each one a scarcely distressing 'exchange of functionaries' (MM 232). The criterion of focusing on singularities is constantly violated.

In a different passage, Adorno notes – seemingly by contrast – that death is commonly perceived as something utterly alien and intolerable. Adorno concedes that this may be a biological problem (MCP 131). Yet, re-emphasising his doubts about the death experience, he also speculates about the impact of social factors: the experience of a terrifying death is at least partly guided by socially generated, generally available concepts. Firstly, 'the more completely all human relations are determined by property', the more the subject, capable of thinking exclusively in property terms, 'exorcises' death *qua* self-loss (ND 362). Secondly, capitalism, having made 'universal defeat' everyone's 'law of . . . life' (1976: 46), has made the enormous differences between what lives could be and what they are undeniable (MCP 132).[8] These 'social transformations' have destroyed the 'epic unity' of a 'rounded life' with death and rendered death unacceptable (ND 362, see also MCP 107, 133). For Adorno the perception of death as an intolerable event thus seems to highlight that 'the experience of death . . . is undoubtedly determined in part by society' (MCP 131) and that experience is undergoing its 'socially determined decline' (ND 363). Again, experience is prevented from relating, in a manner appropriate to it, to a reality that has eluded exchange society.

The proposal of 'death metaphysics'[9] for a more authentic experience of death, Adorno writes – as he wrote of seemingly 'originary experiences' – cannot escape intellectual socialisation either. The 'elevation' of death experience is merely an attempt either to use the partly socially conditioned strangeness of death as an entry point for metaphysics, or to ameliorate its intolerability. Facing self-loss, the subject desperately tries to bring death home as property (ND 361–2); facing the tormenting end of its unrealised life, it attempts to gloss over this terror. 'So deeply' is 'the metaphysics of death . . . bound up with history' (MCP 133).

More detrimentally to 'death metaphysics' – since the most refined experience cannot overcome this obstacle – the experience of death is negated as an experience of a reality outside of society, because its

[8] Adorno refers to Bloch (2006: 21): 'no one is what he thinks and even less what he presents; . . . they get used to the skin . . . into which they've been stuck'. Adorno: 'Even those conciliatory sociologies that apply the concept of "role" . . . acknowledge . . . that the existence imposed on people by society is not identical with what they are in themselves or . . . could be' (CM 167). Pickford (CM 364n1) reads 'role' as a hint at Goffman (1969).

[9] Adorno's term *Todesmetaphysik* (ND 362) is only appropriate on his own reading of the discipline. Heidegger (1962: 292) distinguishes the 'metaphysic of death' from his analyses.

experiential *object*, death, is no such reality. Adorno admits that 'death ... juts into society and culture as something not yet integrated' insofar as it has not been mastered or brought under control (MCP 131). But humans approach death in accordance with their cultural and social conditions. Hence 'death as such', as a 'biological Ur-phenomenon', cannot be separated from its social nexus (ND 363–4). Already in 1931, Adorno doubted that death was indicative of human 'essence', surmising that even in death the human being was 'enclosed in a historical figure' (VSII 539). In the 1940s, he wrote of death as 'the amorphous thing under the net that society has woven over the whole of nature' (MM 232). In the 1960s, he designated dying as a 'social phenomenon'. The death 'intended for [humans] by their societies and states' (MCP 131), familiar to Adorno's twentieth century and also to the twenty-first, is only the most obvious expression of this. 'The sentence, death is always the same, is ... untrue; the form in which consciousness gets to grips with death varies together with the concrete conditions of how someone dies, down to the physis' (ND 364).

In the current historical phase, crucially, people's approach to death involves treating it in accordance with the conditions of exchange society. Their treatment of death in conformity with capitalist forms of thinking is precisely part of exchange society's efforts 'to plug the last holes that the commodity world still left open' (ND 363). The consequences, as indicated, are discernible from the labour market: death as an insurance case is equivalent with a thousand others weighed up against compensation; the deaths of functionaries, who are interchangeable as bundles of commodified labour power conducting ever more finely divided work processes, are just as interchangeable. Heidegger, Adorno chides, is merely 'smitten with death as that which is supposedly absolutely removed from the universal exchange relation' (JA 152).

Adorno's doubts have their most radical reference point in the inmates' death: 'What the sadists in the camp announced to their victims: tomorrow you will wind into the sky as smoke from this funnel, names the indifference of each individual's life, towards which history is moving: already in his formal freedom he is as fungible and replaceable as then under the kicks of the liquidators.' Inside the camp unfolds the monstrous outgrowth of what confronts the experience of death already on the outside. Experience has, as its objects, the fungible deaths of commensurable, homogenised, equalised humans ensnared in exchange relations. 'That in the camps it was no longer the individual that died but the exemplar must affect the dying also of those who escaped the measures.' The murders of Auschwitz show what capitalist integration strives to execute *tout court*: the 'annihilation of the non-identical', of every object of experience that could

escape fungibility (ND 355). ‘Only a humanity to whom death has become as indifferent as its members . . . can inflict it administratively on innumerable people’ (MM 233). Huxley’s dystopia, recurrent in Chapter 1 as that of society, comes full circle. There is no more outside the camp. ‘The Brave New World is one single concentration camp . . . rid of its opposite’ (GS10.1 99).

Throughout, Adorno’s negations of the experience of death are informed by his recognition of the *social* obstacles to experiencing a reality eluding exchange society. Death experience, partly socialised and no longer resisting the use of generally available classificatory categories, is prevented from maintaining a genuine relation with the singularity; and not even the reality of death, the object of experience, can be said to evade exchange relations fully. Negation yields a devastating – albeit, for a sociology of exchange society, devastatingly striking – perspective on the enormous advancement of social integration in capitalism: ‘death comes within the scope of history, and the latter can conversely be grasped in the former’ (MM 231).

Adorno’s meditations on death have found almost no resonance in the present sociology of death and dying. In Howarth’s (2007: 2–3) comprehensive introduction to the field, she clarifies that both the experience of death and the ‘form [mortality] takes’ can be viewed as ‘embedded within our cultural and social worlds’. Sociologists examine socially conditioned experiences of death, ask how societies manage death, and raise questions about the socially constructed nature of death itself. Moreover, sociologists investigate how the treatment of death in different societies reflects underlying cultural and social contexts. Walter’s (1994) well-known writings on ‘death revivalism’, for instance, are concerned with culturally occasioned shifts in Western societies’ perspectives on death, with the corresponding changes in the nature of death itself, and with the ways in which those shifts reflect what Walter calls the contemporary culture of individualism. Adorno’s work on death – substantively and methodologically very different – tackles very similar questions. He asks how exchange society impacts upon subjective experiences of death, how it affects dying itself, and what these aspects of social life reveal about capitalism’s governing cultural and social conditions.

In what seems like a brief addendum, Adorno underscores his negation of experiences of death with reference to society’s impact on subjective experience. Adorno mentions that commonly death is terrifying not because the experience offers a glimpse beyond the familiar ever-same, but because the dying suspect that they and their social relations were never really alive. ‘The horror of death today is essentially the horror of how much the living resemble it’ (MCP 136, ND 363). The camps also

radicalised this situation: 'the boundary between life and death was eradicated'. The camps 'created an intermediate state, living skeletons' (P 260). Earlier sociological considerations help unravel these formulations. Dominated by the exchange principle, humans are treated, treat others, and treat themselves as commodities, notably as saleable labour power, as means of production, as dead things. Comprehensive integration, moreover, entails that humans retain no feature deviating from the social norm any more: every facet of their behaviour becomes a quasi-automatic reaction within the status quo until they operate just like natural mechanisms (MM 228–31). As a result, social relations are lived like relations between things and their reproduction functions as though it were governed by natural laws. The camps intensify this condition by intensifying the reduction of lives to interchangeable and torturable things, their adaptation and the institution's petrifaction. 'The fear of death has given way to the fear of a life which ... marks a state between life and death, a vegetating which occurs under unspeakable physical and psychical torment, ... expressed extremely ... in the ... life of humans who were imprisoned in concentration camps and are still imprisoned there' (Adorno, Horkheimer *et al.* [1953] 1989b: 145). This renders the experience of death an untrustworthy experience of a non-social reality subject to negation. Even if the subject still encountered a death truly evading exchange society as object, it could not tell whether the object of experience is death or merely the rigor mortis of the living *within* exchange society. Adorno's negation is informed by his recognition of social obstacles: socialised human beings and the society generated by their collective actions no longer reveal their human and social character, and become indistinguishable from dead nature. The negation of death experience as an experience of non-social reality traces brings the radical reification of contemporary social life into view. Thus negation also highlights the subject's painful confrontation with an estranged social world – and intersects with the analytical as well as the socio-critical dimension of sociology.

In fact, Adorno's critique of putative encounters with a reality outside of exchange society *usually* intersects with his socio-critical project. Recall his notion that happiness clings to the inexchangeable. 'The drabness of a commodity society which does not allow any quality to exist for its own sake, but levels down everything to a function of universal exchange seems to be unbearable' (SDE 158). 'What is', Adorno repeats, here referring to Beckett, 'is like the concentration camp'. Beckett's figures anticipate an escape in death but are barred from exiting, stuck in the torment between life and death, neither of which they are properly granted, and sentenced to a 'lifelong death penalty' (ND 373). The negation of the possibility to

escape expresses the continuation of their suffering. 'They look mutely out from [Beckett's] sentences as though with eyes whose tears have dried up' (NLII 90). More specifically, the critique of the experience of death as putative exit is informed by the recognition of the *social* obstacles to death as escape. Negations of seemingly genuine experiences of a reality eluding exchange society emphasise society's perpetuation of suffering. Thus negation repeatedly condemns society and urges social change. In the 'seemingly stoical carrying-on' of Beckett's undead, 'it is ... noiselessly screamed that it should be different' (ND 373–4). Their woe speaks: Go. 'Beckett's plays ... arouse ... anxiety ... [a]s disassemblies of semblance ... Their implacability compels [a] change in the mode of behaviour' (NLII 90).

'Only if what is can be changed ...' Yet the questions around a world that *eludes* exchange society immediately return to focus. Auschwitz has interdicted the attempt to theoretically construct and positively assert transcendence. Transcendence can only be imagined as a promise flaring up in 'genuine' experiences of traces of a world not seized by exchange society. Social integration and its ramifications have progressively undermined the subjective capacity for such experiences and the preservation of a non-fungible objective reality. Beckett's 'organized meaninglessness' articulates the ensuing 'explosion of ... meaning' (NLI 242). His 'plays, grey as after sunset and the end of the world, want to exorcise the colourfulness of the circus' (1999:81). In negation, Adorno once more approaches the nihilistic dismissal of any thought about transcendence.

But his approach remains asymptotic. Adorno's aforementioned objection to Kant and positivism – what is blocked now need not be blocked forever – also opposes nihilistic despair as misguided. Adorno comments favourably on the 'naïve consciousness' according to which 'one does not know it yet, but perhaps one day it will be unriddled after all' (ND 379). The abolition of 'beetle-like natural-historical care' could change 'the position of consciousness towards the truth' (ND 382). 'Metaphysical speculation unites with historico-philosophical speculation: it thinks capable of the possibility of a right consciousness ... of ... last things only a future without exigencies of life' (ND 390). Similarly, one might avoid misguided nihilism with the argument that a genuine experience (such as the child's) of a non-socialised reality could still come to pass, and that experience might yet receive the promise of transcendence, namely in altered, more conducive conditions.

Crucially, avoiding misled nihilistic despair through this argument requires an awareness of the potential of social *change*. To reckon with a future position of consciousness towards truth as well as to reckon with

the promise of transcendence *qua* content of a future genuine experience of a reality outside of exchange is to reckon with the possibility of transforming society, which currently infringes on consciousness and experience. 'Only if what is can be changed, then that which is, is not all' (ND 391). If negations of putative encounters of non-social reality traces receive no hint at exchange society's transformability in response, thought threatens to lapse into false despondency.

Adorno puts his appeal in familiar terms, demanding that society, seemingly invariant and objective, be captured as historical and susceptible to human action. Once integration fossilises society to the point of estrangement, it is as tempting to dismiss all thoughts about transcendence with reference to experience's current limitations as it is difficult to envisage social change. Humans have lost 'the ability . . . to imagine the whole as something that could be totally different', harbouring a 'consciousness shut off to possibility'; 'the social apparatus, and this applies to the entire earth, has solidified to such a degree . . . that what is in front of their eyes . . . as the apparent possibility of fulfilment presents itself to them as radically impossible' (Adorno and Bloch [1964] 1988: 4). But 'desperation is the last ideology, historically and socially conditioned' (ND 366). Only a humanity which – unlike Benjamin's genius, perhaps – has not yet risen from the myth that its conditions are unalterable throughout can insist that immanence is all one may ever think of. Correspondingly, resistance to ideological despair requires that the perspective of an objective, invariant condition be challenged. Although thinking the catastrophe is indispensable, even the extreme conditions underlying Auschwitz can and must be conceived as a reality which 'does not confront me as something absolutely strange and . . . different' (MCP 125), but as something produced and reproduced by humans. The apparently insurmountable prison walls of contemporary society are not insurmountable. Such is the only consolation left to metaphysics today – and required by it, if it does not want to embrace false nihilism.

Adorno's perspectives on metaphysics and sociology intersect in a second important respect. His sociology, as shown from different angles throughout this study, strives for glimpses of society's transformability. This sociological endeavour is of significance for metaphysics. If transcendence may still be reckoned with as promise of a genuine experience of a reality not subject to exchange society in future conditions, no critique of metaphysical experience today is justified in surrendering all thoughts about transcendence for good. But in order to avoid false resignation, negations of putative encounters with the non-social in the present require some vision of the possibility of social change. In recognising that social reality is susceptible to transformative action, sociology can create such a

vision. Since transformation depends on people's awareness of society's transformability, sociology might even contribute to that transformation.

Although Adorno seldom names the intersections between his thoughts on metaphysics and sociology, it is noticeable in his sociological writings. It even surfaces from a piece foreshadowing the 'positivist dispute', which otherwise could hardly appear further removed from metaphysical questions:

> The yearning of thought, to which the meaninglessness of what merely is was once unbearable, has been secularised in the urge for disenchantment. It wants to lift the stone under which the malfeasance [Unwesen] is brooding; solely in [the] recognition [of malfeasance] meaning is preserved for it. (PD 68)

Through penetrating what seems like an impenetrable block of granite, through revealing the social malfeasance that human actions have generated and could remove, sociology supports thought's resistance to the ideological dismissal of every notion of possible meaning.

Miniatures

The winding trajectory of Adorno's response to the question whether elements of a world not seized by society have survived and can still be experienced justifies revisiting and illustrating his key points. Adorno's critique of metaphysics raises the issue of metaphysical experience. Transcendence is envisioned as a promise which lights up in genuine experiences of scattered moments of the truly alive, of minute colourful traces that have evaded the web of exchange. At the end of *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno writes that 'metaphysics wanders into micrology', taking 'refuge from the totality [Totale]' (ND 399). Its scientific ring notwithstanding, *Mikrologie* (Duden 1990 s.v.) is simply an old expression for *Kleinigkeitskrämerei*, 'pettifogging' or – Adorno's phrase – 'persistent attention to detail' (HTS 127): 'the micrological glance smashes the shells of what has been helplessly isolated according to the measure of the subsuming generic concept and explodes its identity, the illusion that it would merely be an exemplar' (ND 400). The glance of the child, who is still capable of the individuating persistence necessary for faithfully experiencing elements of the inexchangeable in enticing direct encounters with minutiae of objective reality, is affinitive with micrology. Simultaneously, Adorno states that the possibility of encounters with the non-fungible is becoming ever more unreliable; that such experiences are increasingly prone to negation. Illustrating Adorno's reasoning in this context will not confirm one view over the other, but elucidate both perspectives with reference to different passages in his writings. Adorno's 1967 volume

Ohne Leitbild contains five travelogues, each consisting of several non-headlined fragments – between a few lines and a page long – with notes on experiences in, and details of, places he visited. Treated systematically in light of this chapter's guiding questions, the travelogues can be read as manifestations of Adorno's ideas on the problem of a non-social world and the subject's relationship with it. Since these texts are highly suggestive, the following discussion, to use Bonß's phrase once more, contains 'offers of interpretation'.

Glimmer

Adorno's image of the child's enthralment with village names specifies that genuine experiences of a reality evading exchange society must combine a high level of openness towards the singular in its specificity with the refusal to employ universally applied, identifying categories that would make the singular equivalent. Some sections in his travelogues report encounters which seem to have combined these characteristics and may have even caught a glimpse of something non-fungible. This suggests that such experiences are still occasionally possible and that Adorno has had such experiences. His illustrations of encounters of this kind frequently refer to his childhood: 'I . . . remember the magic emanating from a score, which names the names of instruments and shows of each one exactly what it plays. Flute, Clarinet, Oboe – this promises no less than do colourful tickets or names of villages' (1998a: 3). Indeed, if anybody can confront reality as resistively to generalisation as is required by individuation, it is the 'conceptual neophyte' (Bernstein 2001: 427), whose intellectual socialisation is still incomplete.

Adorno's piece on Amorbach, the Bavarian small town where his family spent many a holiday with their youngster, assembles a series of experiences reminiscent of the image of village names. The fragments' thematic uniqueness is underlined by several textual features. What is immediately striking about 'Amorbach' is Adorno's use of the first person singular, which he normally avoids (see A&H4 641, MM 50), and which seems to convey the experiencing subject's resistance to employing socially available concepts here. The corresponding opposition to generalisation is highlighted by detailed descriptions of the exact spots where – all alone and nowhere else – the enthralling encounters came to pass. Adorno specifies the 'glaringly blazing fire' in Amorbach's smithy '[i]n the main street, round the corner of the beloved [Hotel] Post' (OL 302); the old guitar on the wall '[n]ext to the pianino with the Mozart medallion . . . in the guestroom of the Post'; and the path from Amorbach to Miltenberg, which leads past 'Reuenthal, a gentle valley village off the Gotthard, . . . via

the still ever secluded Monbrunn, in a sweeping bend through the forest, which seems to be getting denser', past 'all sorts of ruins', towards a 'gate which, due to the coldness of the woody location, one calls Schnatterloch [Chatterhole]', and which – 'suddenly, abruptly, without any transition, like in dreams' – opens up to Miltenberg's 'most beautiful medieval market square' (OL 305–6). Adorno's meticulous depictions express the subject's unbending focus on the particular. His references to the physical vibrations in his encounters amplify his refusal to abstract from, and classify, the experiential object: 'Very early every morning, the booming beats [of the nearby smithy] woke me up. Never was I therefore angry with them' (OL 302). With similar intensity Adorno recalls his 'intoxicat[ion]' with the 'dark dissonance' of the 'vibrat[ing]', 'untuned' guitar strings (OL 306) and the 'sounds of the [Main River] ferry above water': sounds *denen man schweigend nachhorcht*, 'which one is quietly listening after' (OL 303). The individual follows the singular object with gentle persistence.

Adorno's fragment on Amorbach's monastery reassembles all of these textual features. The view from 'a place in the lake-garden, artistically hidden behind a group of trees by the likeably smelling pond populated by carps, releases a small, surveyable section of the monastery'. Here, '[s]till ever restored . . . is the beauty, after the foundation of which I inquire in vain before the whole' (OL 302). The unmistakably personal tone expresses the individuality of the encounter. The geographical specification re-emphasises the subject's non-generalising, open concern for the singular detail. The re-creation of the experience's somatic dimension underlines its avoidance of conceptual abstraction. 'Amorbach' describes experiences which, Adorno seems to think, individuated the experiential object.

This raises the question whether he also believes he experienced elements of a reality evading exchange society without having been fooled. One may suggest that he does, albeit with little certainty – not least due to the resistance of such a reality to conceptual resolution. The passage through the Schnatterloch into Miltenberg, for instance, is retrospectively described as a passage into 'happiness'. Happiness clings to the inexchangeable, to those colourful ruptures in identity bearing the 'last trace of a world of perception not yet confiscated by commerce' (1992a: 55). Moreover, Adorno hints at elements in what he encountered which have escaped the human actions maintaining capitalism: the old guitar is missing strings and untuned (OL 306); Amorbach's ferry 'has its particular expression in that it, an archaic vessel', has nothing 'of the willingly preserved of traditional costume clubs and historical monuments'; the monastery is free of 'energetic structuring'. Finally, many of these objects – e.g. the smithy looming in from a time predating gasoline stations and

echoing the long gone (OL 302–3) – correspond to Adorno's specification of colourful traces of life as stemming from the past (ND 370).

'[O]nly in one specific place', Adorno adds, 'can one have the experience of happiness, that of the inexchangeable, even if it subsequently turns out that [the inexchangeable] was not unique' (OL 305). This sentence authorises two readings (OL 304). Adorno may imply that to the child, to his individuating experience, Amorbach *seemed* incomparable and inexchangeable, whereas the adult later understands that even the architecture of Amorbach, Miltenberg, Wertheim was already somewhat standardised and fungible. Believing to have glimpsed a reality that had eluded exchange society, the child was misled. It is also plausible, though, that Adorno implies that Amorbach appears no longer inexchangeable later in life because years of exposure to the standardised world have blinded adult experience to the specific. The previously incomparable subsequently seems no longer unique only because adults are no longer capable of individuation. From this angle, the adult is mistaken: the possibility that what the child experienced in Amorbach truly *was* a reality evading society remains intact.

Having said this, Adorno does not deem infancy a prerequisite for genuine experiences. He occasionally mentions enticed encounters with the 'numerous colourful ticket designs . . . on the London buses' (A&B 71). The child's 'optical [sensorium]' is especially conducive to encountering colours 'shining out of quotidian grey' (1992a: 55), but the bus tickets were experienced by the grown man in English exile who had preserved his sensorium. Correspondingly, Adorno's travelogues on his postwar journeys contain a handful of passages quite similar to those from 'Amorbach'. They sporadically hint at encounters which, so he appears to think, still achieved the individuating persistence necessary to engage with traces outside of exchange society. Travelling away from the context of quotidian grey may well have enhanced the subject's resistance to conventional modes of experience.

Three textual features, familiar from 'Amorbach', resurface in a fragment about a stroll through the Tuscan city of Lucca. Adorno uses the first person singular, signalling his resistance to universally available categories, while his insistence on geographical minutiae indicates his struggle against generalisation: 'After endlessly asking for directions back and forth, in the Palazzo Guinigi, in a quarter which I had not known yet . . . On the very high tower a holly oak, landmark of the city . . . The parterre crammed with bicycles and all sorts of dregs'. By evoking a sense of physical effort, Adorno articulates the somatic dimension of his experience and his perseverant pursuit of the specific object in opposition to conceptual abstraction: climbing over the dregs in the jammed parterre,

'I found my way through to the edge of a garden of unkempt splendour' (OL 397).

Adorno's remarks on happiness also seem to represent a selected few of his travel encounters as individuations. Genuine experiences of happiness refuse to pin it down with identifying concepts. The child was shown to experience happiness in the village names only from a distance, by anticipating happiness. This is what happened to Adorno in Lucca: 'The displays in the shops, even the scanty ones, have something of treasures. They are already available to him who only walks past them. Their lure is the happiness that the lure is promising' (OL 396). Once the child in Adorno's image enters the village, happiness recedes like the rainbow. Yet the child is not disappointed, recognising that true experiences of happiness cannot hold happiness fast in identification. After a performance of Smetana's *Bartered Bride* in Vienna, Adorno notes: 'The decorations were naturalistic. I am not ashamed to have liked them. The village images [*sic*!] knew the secret of stage decoration as form: to bring the yearningly far away so close, as though one were inside it, without lessening the scent of distance' (OL 425). Both fragments describe the spatio-temporal distance that a genuinely happy experience, as open and as resistant to universally applied concepts as is appropriate in such moments, keeps to what it encounters.

Might these have been experiences of genuine traces of a world eluding exchange society? Two of Adorno's Luccan encounters kindle an uncertain 'yes'. First, there is the 'garden of unkempt splendour', which Adorno found after much trouble. A few pages on, having detailed his position in '[d]eep, cold twilight' in front of Lucca's San Michele church, Adorno recounts this view:

> Unprotected, as if it could collapse any moment, the empty, four storied façade stretched into the grey blue sky. I understood all of a sudden why, bare of any function, it is, against architectonic wisdom, so beautiful. It exhibits its own functionlessness, does not claim for a second to be anything other than the ornament that it is. (OL 400)

Adorno makes several suggestions that in Lucca he truly encountered a reality outside of exchange society. Lucca's garden is described as *verwahrlost* (neglected, unkempt), the façade as 'unprotected'. This implies that they have been undisturbed by human action for some time. In sociological terms, the garden and the façade have evaded the sphere of influence of human actions maintaining exchange society – and thereby that of society itself. The Luccan garden, Adorno continues, 'yielded what the grey of the forecourt denied' (OL 397); the façade is distinguished from the sky's grey. The similarity between these passages and Adorno's

momentary objections to the notion that society's greyness is omnipresent with reference to colourful traces of a life evading exchange is too striking to be coincidental. Garden and façade bear traces of colour. The final clue is provided by the façade's 'functionlessness'. A 'society ... totally ruled by the exchange principle' is 'virtually functionalized throughout', maintained solely by human actions which force everything to fulfil social functions. '[T]he functionless' eludes the grasp of these actions and 'does not subscribe to th[e] context' they maintain (1976: 41). The functionless resists being reduced to a means exchangeable for the fulfilment of a social purpose and is thus also recalcitrant to becoming interchangeable with other means forced to stand in for that end. 'Whatever has a function is replaceable; irreplaceable only what is good for nothing' (1976: 103). 'Not anything other than ...' is antithetical to a state in which 'everything that exists' is only a 'being-for-something-else' – the state of contemporary capitalism Adorno was shown to describe in Chapter 1. Adorno seems to think that in Lucca he encountered elements which, having originated in production operating in particular social conditions, have since escaped human making and its context of exchange society.[10]

When Adorno published his travelogues – first in newspapers from 1958 onwards, then in *Ohne Leitbild* – they were 'dismissed ... as "feuilletonistic chatter"' (Pabst 2003: 215). In the meantime, these 'miniatures' (2003: 10) have informed several biographical studies. Yet neither their reference to childhood memories nor their personal tone, nor their accounts of minute somatic reverberations, nor their meticulous descriptions of places of visit, nor their intimate reports of happiness make Adorno's travelogues primarily autobiographical. All these features, atypical for his work, convey an atypical mode of experience. The travelogues seem to report encounters which highlight individuation as a necessity for genuine experiences and allusively illustrate its fulfilment. The passages cited largely forgo theoretical argumentation. Negation, which conditions the interjections, ruptures, turns, reconfigurations and reciprocities of so many of Adorno's texts, is prominently absent. The encounters are questioned neither by reflections on the experiential subject nor by critical scrutiny of the objects. Their theoretical abstinence suggests the travelogues' importance for a refined understanding of Adorno's theory of society. The silence of negation articulates that some of Adorno's encounters may have even offered – inconspicuously and admittedly with little certainty – glimpses of those increasingly rare traces of a reality evading exchange society that Adorno still deems perceptible. Miltenberg's

[10] See also Rosiek's (2002: 401 9) account of 'natural beauty' as *Zuspruch* (advice, con solation), with which the Luccan fragments seem to resonate.

market square, the Luccan façade, the garden: these might be truly beautiful strangers, not just seemingly beautiful (but really only pretty) commodities. Adorno, for one, deemed his 'loose sequences of immediate experiences ... quite *hintergründig* [cryptic, subtle, profound]' (Adorno and Tobisch 2003: 169). The travelogues appear to render Adorno's oft-stated, oft-read notion that there is no longer anything that is not mediated by capitalist society much less conclusive than he would – at least momentarily – have wanted it to be read. This is sociologically decisive.

Negation and microsociology

However, these passages must not be taken for Adorno's definitive decision on the issues engaging this chapter. His sociological interjection that the progress of capitalist integration prevents subjects from having immediate individuating experiences and socialises ever more of objective reality, cannot be ignored. Even 'the functionless' is tendentially seized by 'profit' (1976: 41). Suggestive encounters of the kind just reported – including Adorno's own (remember his 'we') – are increasingly unlikely and subject to scrutiny. The travelogues illustrate this problem. Several encounters in which the subject seems to have glimpsed beyond or past society are negated. Adorno's criticisms of genuine experiences eventually intersect with his sociological project. His negations of putative experiences of a non-social reality are always informed by his recognition of the social conditions barring such encounters. The travelogues spotlight these conditions in their omnipresence as conditions of obstruction and human suffering.

Adorno's piece on the Romansh-Swiss village of Sils Maria, where he occasionally holidayed after World War II, reports:

> From the roof over there, we had to watch the Sputnik in the evenings. It could not have been distinguished from a star, not from Venus, had it not been tottering on its course. That is what mankind's victories are about. What they dominate the cosmos with, the realised dream, is dreamily shaken, *ohnmächtig* [powerless and unconscious], as though it sought to tumble. (OL 326)

The observation, which might have been expected to culminate in an encounter with a faraway world escaping the terrestrial web of exchange, is immediately negated. Adorno's negation is informed by his awareness of the social context infringing on such encounters. Rather than avoiding socialised modes of experience in radical individuation, the stargazer's experience is forced to partake ('had to watch') in a socially mediated conception of a utopian dream. Moreover, Sputnik illustrates how socialisation is closing in on all objective elements potentially evading society.

Adorno concedes that 'innumerable so-called utopian dreams, ... television, the possibility to reach other stars, movement faster than sound, have been fulfilled'. Yet the scene in Switzerland strengthens his suspicion 'that one is not happy about them; that these dreams themselves have, in their realisation, assumed a peculiar character ... of boredom' (Adorno and Bloch [1964] 1988: 1). 'Boredom', Adorno emphasises, 'is the reflex to the objective grey' of the 'ever-same' (CM 171). The satellite suggests that 'the fulfilment of utopia consists in general only in a repetition of the ever-same "Today"' (Adorno and Bloch [1964] 1988: 2). Instead of enabling individuals to 'love the stranger' and relate to a non-socialised world, space travel annexes in shaky victories even the extraterrestrial. Social domination and integration is extended onto, even beyond, the world and directly undermines encounters with a reality evading society.

Before the war, Adorno remembers in another fragment, the ground in Vienna's Prater park still bore the 'trace of a forest', which 'yield[ed] to one's feet' and 'contributed to its happiness' (OL 423). Having lived in the Austrian capital in the 1920s (Müller-Doohm 2009: 82–94), Adorno must have had these prospects in mind when he returned to it in 1967– only to be disappointed. The Prater 'has ... lost its scent' and become a lie. This is partly due to the park's war wounds, 'even though the trees are growing again'. More importantly, the trees now have signs warning people of falling branches and one walks on asphalted paths like in New York's Central Park. The traces of forest gently stimulating the body and kindling happiness have been erased: 'it was explained to me that asphalting conduced to saving costs; otherwise the personnel that would keep the paths in order could not be paid' (OL 423). Adorno negates his expectation of happiness in recognition of social integration. Human actions have subjected the park to their governing exchange principle and obliterated its colourful vestiges. Socialisation is revealed as the force entangling the world in commodity exchange relations and condemned as the engine of perpetual unhappiness.

During a hike in Switzerland's Engadin valley, Adorno notes the 'pathos of distance' of a landscape beyond the social world. 'It exhales no ... humanity.' What is 'untouched beyond the timber line' contradicts 'the notion of nature as something ... intended for humans' and 'reveals what it looks like in the cosmos'. '[T]he moraines characteristic of that landscape', Adorno adds, 'resemble industrial tips, rubble heaps of mining'. This addendum primarily aims to further undermine the bourgeois idyllic image of nature as 'field track'. Paradoxically, though, Adorno's addendum also issues a challenge to putative glimpses of a world beyond society. This challenge is based on an unsettling recognition of the conditions obstructing such experiences and brings them into critical

perspective. Earlier, Adorno interjected that the experience of death was indistinguishable from an experience of reified social life. Here, Adorno glimpses the landscape's objection to the 'cultural philosophy' that all reality is reconcilable with humanity, thus seemingly peering beyond human making. But this experience immediately invokes the 'scars of civilisation' and its 'domination over nature': resembling moraines, they seem equally irreconcilable with the 'zone' of 'historically familiar life'. Adorno's image could thus be read as one of society's petrifaction, which is so far advanced that it renders experience unable to distinguish between a first nature, evading exchange society, and society's second nature, created by humans but apparently just as far removed from their influence (OL 327, see also 1999: 68).

As social integration seizes everyone and everything, ostensible individuating experiences of the non-fungible detail are increasingly prone to negation. Persistence before the detail passes through negation and re-emerges as Adorno's microsociology of exchange society, as extrapolation of the social whole from single – now through and through social – phenomena. 'The more socialised the world is, the more densely its objects are spun over with general determinations, the more ... the individual fact [Sachverhalt] is immediately transparent onto its universal; the more one can, by looking at it, discern from it [aus ihm herausschauen] precisely through micrological immersion in it' (ND 90). '[D]ialectical' sociology is compelled to interlink 'micrology' and the 'mediation through totality' as each other's 'counterpoint' (PD 39).

Adorno's ideas on metaphysics and sociology share another intersection point. Where seemingly genuine experiences tend to face negation due to social relations reminiscent of a primeval, eternal landscape, total despair is certainly seductive. Yet it is no less ideological: faithful encounters with a reality outside of exchange society which receive the promise of transcendence might still be possible in future, suitable conditions. Sustaining this vision against misled despair demands that negation be responded to with an indication of the possibility that the frozen conditions may melt. Adorno's travelogues illustrate his objection to ideological despondency and to the view that the conditions obstructing and denying contact with the inexchangeable are unmovable. The following passages underline the role sociology can play in bolstering thought's resistance to misguided resignation, by offering glimpses of social reality's transformability.

One of Adorno's Austrian fragments relates an anecdote his friend L[11] told him:

[11] Lotte Tobisch Baroness von Labotýn, actress and former organiser of Vienna's Opera Ball.

as a child of seven or eight years in the Sacré Coeur,[12] she was writing untidily, making blots in her notebooks. The teaching Sister admonished her: 'If you continue like this, the dear child Jesus will feel hurt.' She responded: 'Well, it cannot be helped'; because of this, she was removed from the pious school. But she only lent expression, as a perfect echo, to Viennese metaphysics.

It is not that L straightforwardly refuted transcendence. Her metaphysics doubted neither the Lord nor His concern with her handwriting.

> She just envisaged above the Catholic order a higher one, impenetrably hierarch ical, a Viennese Moira of nonchalance, against whom nothing helps. Fatality beyond the Deity governs existence ... The course of the world is deemed incorrigible, like closed offices; all must bow to it. (OL 423 4)

Viennese metaphysics wants to leave room for the idea of transcendence, but inadvertently negates it by envisioning transcendence as subordinate to an immanent social order which, unswerving on its course, has eclipsed it for good. Subjecting not only herself but also God to this order, L voiced the difficulty of reaching beyond a petrified society which dominates all life and operates like intransigent fate. However, her off-the-cuff despair is also prone to criticism. One may still reckon with the promise of transcendence as experiential content in future conditions insofar as one can imagine the possibility of social transformation. Surrendering to the status quo as fate and 'enthroning scepticism' itself 'as the absolute', Viennese metaphysics wrongly denies this possibility. L's off-handedness, which Adorno also observes in the infamous coolness of the Viennese vis-à-vis the death of loved ones, and which distinguishes Austria from the 'German world of work' familiar to him, even reveals its dark side: 'something of the identification with evil ... Resignation to the inevitable becomes its recommendation. From here, it is not far to Schadenfreude ... He who doesn't take it to heart, gladly lets the burden take its course' (OL 424).[13] The intersections between this 1967 fragment and Adorno's 1953 sociological essay 'Individual and Organisation' are not coincidental. The individual's 'inability' to intervene in social formations, Adorno argues in this essay, makes their 'progress' appear as something 'metaphysically inflicted' and their status quo as something 'absolute' (SSI 445). Sociology's task is to support the resistance of thought to misguided despair by highlighting the transformability of social conditions. 'Total determinism' is 'mythical' (MCP 189n16).

[12] A Viennese Catholic grammar school.

[13] Tobisch describes 'It cannot be helped' as an 'Austrian speciality' (Adorno and Tobisch 2003: 233). Adorno spotted this 'bourgeois' phrase in Huxley, where it translates 'the perfidious "You must adjust" in totalitarian Brave New Worlds' (P 114).

Adorno's effort to challenge despondency in this way characterises an intriguing passage in his Paris travelogue, one of his comparatively rare statements devoted only to painting (see NLII 319), written after a visit to the Jeu de Paume Museum (Adorno *et al.* 2003: 77). Whereas the German successors to French Impressionism aimed for 'undisturbed surrender to nature', the motifs of French Impressionism, Adorno emphasises, include 'signa of modernity' like 'railway bridges'. French Impressionism rightly questions the present possibility of looking straight past socialised society, noting instead that the humanly produced materials themselves have solidified to the point of seeming intangibly alien: modern 'artefacts ... have become autonomous against the body and the eyes of humans' and look 'as if they were ... nature'. Yet French Impressionism is equally instructive in avoiding despondency. Through its depiction, says Adorno,

> [t]hat which defies experience is nevertheless ... supposed to be experienced, the estranged is nevertheless supposed to become closeness ... The pictorial realisa tion wants to assimilate to what is alive, to salvage for life, even the estranged ... The fact that ... the grey things have their colourful shadows is ... the sensuous appearance of such metamorphosis. (OL 321 2)

In French impressionist painting, ideological despair over grey immanence is confronted with traces of colour – albeit, unlike in Amorbach or Lucca, not with colours issuing from a reality that has eluded exchange society, but with colourful shadows of society's own grey *signa*. It is precisely as such that the colours mark an appropriate intervention against total despair. In the present conditions, the attempt to encounter a reality outside of exchange directly, such as German painting's striving for an undisturbed relationship with nature, is subject to negation. Yet capitulating to greyness would be equally false, since experiencing a reality that eludes grey immanence may be possible in the future. Emerging *in*directly, as shadows of a grey social reality to whose estrangement the painting has objected by indicating that it is a product of living humans, the colours rightly signal that possibility: the potential of transforming a society made by humans into conditions conducive to genuinely experiencing colours of a life that is not subject to exchange.

It is worth following Adorno back to Amorbach once more. The piece's eighth fragment opens with a childhood memory. Deciphering this passage is difficult, but if my hunch that it depends on the ambiguity of key words is defensible, the fragment is illuminating here. As a boy, Adorno recalls, he used to play between the border posts of Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg just outside Amorbach. Doubts notwithstanding, this area felt like it 'belonged to neither state, was free'. The political borders, 'as I wonderingly discovered, just did not effect any change in the landscape'.

'The land ... they enclosed ... was no-man's-land.' Entering felt like 'escap[ing]' the 'restrictions'. Hinting at the land's freedom from property relations, at its evasion of the sphere of human actions imposing dividing lines on the world, Adorno appears to be alluding to a putative encounter with a reality escaping society. Yet the course of history soon stimulated suspicions. 'Later, in the war [World War I], the word [no-man's-land] emerged for the devastated area between the two fronts.' By highlighting the ambiguity of the term 'no-man's-land', Adorno re-emphasises the questionability of such experiences today. The distinction between a truly non-social world (first nature) and a world seized and disfigured by society itself[14] but now seemingly just as inaccessible to human intervention (second nature) has become hard to draw.

Nevertheless, the fragment's final sentence takes a sharp final turn away from total despair. The word 'no-man's-land' 'is, however [aber]' – note the sudden change in direction – 'the faithful translation of the Greek ..., which I then understood the better the less I knew it, utopia' (OL 305). Adorno's resistance to despondency draws on the ambiguity of the word *utopia*. The totally socialised society has rendered any vision of utopia, any understanding of this word, in its *original* sense, difficult – 'no place', 'nowhere land', here a reality that has eluded society's divisive property relations.[15] And yet the word simultaneously inspirits Adorno's *aber* to defy despair. For 'utopia' also has a second, *settled* meaning: 'a world transformed to perfection', roused by Adorno's remark that its original sense is increasingly unfamiliar. Adorno suggests that it would be premature to jettison the word utopia in the original sense, insofar as one may still reckon with utopia in the settled sense. A reality eluding exchange society – utopia originally conceived – can still be reckoned with as potential experiential content in future conducive conditions, in a utopia in the settled sense. Adorno offers no conception of this commensurate state, other than that it would be rid of the unhappiness and disappointment over 'no-man's-land'. The transformability of society into a perfect world, intended by 'utopia' in the settled sense, suffices to question the desperate ideological conclusion of total determinism, that utopia in the original sense, a 'no-man's-land' outside of exchange society, can never be experienced again. It is *sociology's* task to provide such responses to negations of experiences of a non-socialised reality. Any thinker who 'takes utopia and its realisation bitterly seriously', Adorno states, 'is no

[14] Truly an 'image of violence ..., as which the world presents itself to humans, who did violence to it' (ND 280).

[15] '[U]topia of the qualitative: that which by virtue of its difference and uniqueness cannot be absorbed into the prevalent exchange relation' (MM 120).

utopian, but looks at reality as it is, so as not to be stultified by it'. Yet this is precisely how this thinker examines possibilities for transforming reality, 'want[ing] to liberate the elements of the better, which are enclosed in it, from its captivity' (SSI 37).

In 1954, Adorno took his first aeroplane journey from Los Angeles to New York. It inspired him to another piece, formally and thematically belonging to the *Ohne Leitbild* travelogues but collected posthumously in *Miscellanea*. The text offers an illustrative summary of the key points emerging from these reflections. The 'dream of flying' generates expectations – perhaps, to the air-travel novice Adorno, even more intensely than dreams of travelling by other means – of decontextualised encounters resisting conventional modes of perception and identification. The prospect of 'weightless freedom', air pockets and airsickness arouses visions of experiencing a world that eludes the control of human actions maintaining social domination. Yet to Adorno, the 10 hours he spent in mid-air mainly illustrate that in capitalist integration ever more experiences of this kind are subject to scrutiny and negation. 'When dreams are fulfilled, it is different from how one dreamt. This is also true of flying': 'the image of the flight has become dull, monochromatic' (VSII 549–50).[16]

Adorno's critical inquiry concentrates chiefly on the passengers' subjective experience, namely on the social obstacles to the individuating glance that would be required for encountering a non-social reality. Aeroplanes are the pre-eminent manifestation of the subject's integration into structures on which the subject's survival depends:

> [W]hat one must do or refrain from doing is made known ... through banners. Sometimes they convey that one should strap oneself in with a safety belt ... [O]ne develops the suspicion that by means of the belt they make sure that in case of a catastrophe nobody can escape on their own initiative ...

Correspondingly, the experiencing intellect is so comprehensively assimilated, the opposition of the subject – no longer 'I' but consistently 'one' (*man*) in this text – to socially available identifying concepts collapses:

> The glance ... finally ... sees what millions have seen before and involuntarily repeats what their organs have already carried out ... everyone seems wholly used to what is going on. Even speaking of flying is considered beneath one's dignity; one ... hardly looks out.

The technological-institutional cocoon enwrapping and aligning experience with common procedures shuts down the open focus on the specific.

[16] That said, sometimes even Adorno was excited about flying (Adorno and Tobisch 2003: 39, 77).

Less by the height than by the organisation's isolating layer one is separated from the impressions one promises oneself. Maybe this explains something of the passengers' indifference. The most exciting experience is so regulated that expe rience scarcely comes to pass. (VSII 548 9)

The somatic reverberations, characteristic of earlier encounters, have atrophied:

[N]othing happens that would stir one up from one's seat . . . Even he who hesitated to fly for a long time remains free of fear. In the giant aeroplanes, the air pressure is compensated; . . . airsickness no longer exists. The air pockets of tall tales cannot be noticed. Not even the moment of leaving the earth can be specified with certainty. Perhaps it is drowned out by the immoderate roaring of the engines, which are unleashed immediately beforehand, and to which one feels delivered up, so deprived of any relation to one's own body that one succumbs without quite being able to be afraid . . . [T]ouching down on the ground is nothing but a soft bump.

The contrast to Adorno's village images is glaring. In these conditions, not even children are moved to enthralment any more, 'take little notice of what is going on, . . . are quiet, playing or sleeping, as though they had grown up with it, not even the technical apparatus, the superabundantly equipped cockpit, seems to interest them' (VSII 549–50).

The children's boredom, however, is not only a sign of the experiential subject's deformation in social integration; it is also an all-too-fitting response to the ever-same objective grey. For does the standardisation of flying, Adorno asks his student audience, not also highlight the socialisation of all objective reality, the eradication of all objective traces of the specific, non-identical, truly alive and beautiful stranger?

[A]ll over the world airports resemble one another, . . . the entire business of loudspeakers, hostesses and everything that goes with them, you will indeed find it hard to resist the impression that other differences between individual towns and countries exist largely only to motivate passengers to travel from one to another, from Karachi to Naples or elsewhere; however, were it not for that advertising interest, the form the airports so hauntingly symbolise would also I almost said bury beneath itself all these cities without mercy. And that thereby the fundamen tal equality [Egalität, also: 'indifference'] of the exchange principle under which we exist would then also manifest itself in the forms of human life which still confront us with their deceptive colourfulness. (HF 109 10)

Once more, Adorno's analysis of the social obstacles to a genuine experience of a reality eluding exchange society pushes him to the edge of ideological despair. Again, he avoids falling off – but by now only by a hair's-breadth:

In the adventurous contraction of the flight, as the minimised one, the earth becomes the heavenly body that desire pictures to itself, a star among stars, and

> gives birth to the hope for those that do not resemble her. As the earth stays behind and vanishes below us, the cautious trust is roused that other stars might be inhabited by happier ones than we. (VSII 551)

Is Adorno being silly? Perhaps, but only and precisely insofar as withstanding the 'miserably ontic' requires a moment of 'folly' (ND 396). For might one not still reckon with the experience of a world properly alien to, not merely estranged from, humans and their society, if only in future conditions conducive to such an experience? To Adorno, ignoring this potential would mean letting negation culminate in a misrepresentation of social, historical conditions maintained by humans, which currently obstruct experiences of anything outside of themselves, as invariant, objective nature. This misrepresentation, inseparable from total despair, is what the futuristic allusion seeks to avoid. From a distance, contracted, the earth, entangled in the dense web of exchange impenetrable to those inside it, suggests for a split second the possibility that it may still 'vanish below us' and resurface as the heavenly paradise, which it presently merely fancies itself to be but is repeatedly prevented from becoming. In a world whose colours are blurring into the identical grey of total exchangeability that was realised in the camps' hell on earth, such a perspective is certainly nothing short of 'adventurous'. Adorno's passage is not all science. Nor, however, is it mere fiction. It is 'exact fantasy', the upshot of a theoretical perspective on social, historical conditions, which bolsters the last frail barricades against misguided despair that thought can still uphold.

Simultaneously, this passage expresses just how 'cautious' Adorno's vision of the possibility of leaving 'our world behind' for a different 'star' has become. His sociological concerns over the potential of examining, criticising, transforming and textually representing the socialised world have been detailed in this book. It is the unavoidability of these concerns, it seems, that prevents Adorno from placing his trust for the arrangement of conditions 'inhabitable' by 'happier ones', favourable to the eye's bliss over colours that need 'not resemble' the grey of the present, exclusively in terrestrials. Once thought has analysed the ramifications of a world in which nothing under the sun is not socially mediated – or almost nothing; ultimately Adorno does not decide – the subject's resistance to resignation can scarcely survive on the hope for a humanly transformed earth alone and must, so as not to be broken, momentarily engage the image of a world from under a different sun.

Conclusion

The last chapter's detour through metaphysical problems justifies the question whether it is helpful to speak of Adorno's *sociology* at all. His work certainly contains extensive reflections expressly dedicated to the problems and potentials of sociology: on the concept of society, the selection of sociological research phenomena, empirical research, theoretical analysis, sociology's socio-critical dimension, its relationship with political praxis and the question of the sociological text. Moreover, Adorno's *oeuvre* comprises a range of substantive sociological studies dealing with radio content, fascist propaganda, products of the culture industry, details of everyday life, public and non-public opinions etc. Adorno's sociological writings also took lasting inspiration from fellow and rival sociologists, notably Durkheim, Weber and Kracauer, but also Veblen, Simmel, Lazarsfeld and Riesman.

And yet readers of Adorno's sociological writings will hardly overhear their dialogue with his other areas of interest. His sociology informs his epistemological critique of factual knowledge, his rejection of elementary analysis and his refusal to endorse collective activism. Conversely, his perspectives on empirical social research and the sociological text are shaped by aesthetic considerations, while his views on theoretical analysis, sociology's socio-critical components and its engagement with death and dying are guided by his work in different philosophical fields. Moreover, Adorno's sociology was strongly influenced by intellectual endeavours outside the discipline's immediate realm. Benjamin's aesthetics and historiography, Horkheimer's critical theory, Marx's and Lukács's economic, social and political thought, the philosophies of Kant, Hegel and Husserl, Popperian and 'positivist' scientific theory, the literature of Huxley and Beckett's work have emerged as important points of reference. Finally, it would be unreasonable to suggest that Adorno's concern with sociology – albeit crucial for his overall project – outweighed his preoccupation with philosophy and aesthetics.

Adorno traces affinities between strict disciplinary discriminations and the ideology of identification. If, during a conference, one 'banged [one's]

fist on the table and declared: "We demand a sociology that seeks to be nothing other than sociology"', one 'could be sure of a certain measure of collective assent' (IS 101). For '[t]hinking in . . . "little boxes" is extremely widespread' (IS 124). Relatively new disciplines, including sociology, encounter the additional dilemma – which suffused Durkheim's work and informed Simmel's thinking – of having to conquer a territory for their identity on the 'map of . . . sciences' to 'prove . . . their right to exist' (IS 125, see also SSI 514–15). Not only is Adorno critical of identity thinking, he also guards against proposals that sociology 'restric[t] itself to opinions and preferences or . . . interpersonal relationships, social forms, institutions, power relationships and conflicts' because this may lead sociologists to ignore pressing economic issues such as humanity's self-preservation or exchange (IS 141). Depending on the demands of the phenomena under scrutiny, sociology may or must draw upon the help of other disciplines, especially philosophy, psychology, economics and history. Phenomena such as radio music, for instance, can only be studied in all their implications through 'close collaboration of analytically minded musicians, social scientists, and experts on radio engineering' (1979: 110). 'The division of labour between disciplines . . . is not located in their subject matter, but . . . forced upon the latter from outside', and hence to be critically reflected (1972: 127, see also GS9.2 356).

Nonetheless, the idea of Adorno's specifically sociological work cannot simply be abandoned. The discriminations between disciplines, he holds, have not been conjured up by scientists. The 'scientific division of labour . . . has a socio-economic model, . . . it is mediated by the division of labour in material production, which first emerged in the early-bourgeois phase of manufacturing' (IS 100). The 'talk of interdisciplinary studies on every street-corner' conveys that 'disciplines separated by the division of labour' which are 'somehow working together could . . . actually solve the problem . . . behind the division of labour' (IS 109). Adorno's idea that intellectuals alone cannot erase socially enforced disciplinary boundaries remains up-to-date in a relatively straightforward sense. Disciplinary divisions in social science, Wallerstein (2000: 33) argues, remain 'organizationally very strong' while lacking 'intellectual justification'. If social science is ever reorganised at all, then 'ministries of education and university administrations' – 'probably' motivated by 'rationalization in order to reduce costs' – will be more 'likely' to determine this process than 'social scientists themselves'.

Adorno's concerns about the social obstacles to erasing certain disciplinary boundaries are also informed by more complex arguments. Freud's psychoanalysis does inform Adorno's conception of society. Yet Adorno, citing Parsons (1964: 336–7, 339–42), opposes calls for a human science

whose basic stock of categories would provide the foundation for uniting psychology and sociology. The separation of sociology and psychology is misleading insofar as the 'objectivity derives from [living subjects]' (SP1 69). But a conceptually unified human science would deny the rift between individual interests and society's interests (PETG 144–6, see also PD 16–17). Individual social actions conform to society's requirements not because these requirements match individual interests, but because individuals live under society's pressure to suppress their interests and take on social 'functions' (PETG 150). Notably, individuals act in conformity to exchange society's economic rationality not due to innate psychological dispositions, but because they have internalised social commandments to act accordingly in the form of the fear that deviance will lead to their social exclusion and downfall (SP1 71–2). Social pressure is enhanced by exchange society's operation as a reified process, seemingly independent of individuals, which confronts them as objective constraint (PETG 151). '[P]sychological categories' are not as 'productive' for 'sociology' as sociological concepts (PETG 146).[1] For several reasons, Adorno hesitated to subscribe to the talk of interdisciplinarity of his time, and he might have deemed it equally difficult to subscribe to current programmes for a 'post-disciplinary social/cultural/political science'.[2]

Sociology, Adorno maintains, constitutes a discipline characterised by questions and methods specific to it. This does not force sociologists to adopt discriminatory identity thinking in pursuit of a purified sociology. As Adorno's own writings on sociology and studies of various social phenomena illustrate, sociologists can push disciplinary boundaries, momentarily cross them and establish points of contact between different fields: their questions, approaches, conceptual devices and insights. Sociology can create spaces of resistance to identification and the social division of labour. Unsurprisingly, the works of the 'Frankfurt School' constitute timely resources for sociologists who insist that 'innovation results from . . . scholars moving from the centre to the periphery of their discipline and then crossing its borders' (Urry 2000b: 210). Yet interlocutions with other disciplines do not lead Adorno to blend sociology

[1] Nor can sociological categories exhaust psychological research (PETG 146 9).

[2] I borrow this phrase from Urry (2000a: 199 200), who criticises the development it designates: 'innovation does not principally result from . . . scholars . . . firmly entrenched within disciplines, nor from those practicing . . . "interdisciplinary" or "post disciplinary" studies'. In a more recent study, Urry (2003: 124), exploring complexity metaphors for analysing global relationality, describes 'complexity notions . . . as the basis of a thorough going post disciplinarity appropriate to the diverse material worlds currently moving across the globe . . . Such post disciplinarity would involve systematic analyses to transcend the physical science/social science divide.'

into a 'methodological[ly] integrat[ed]' (IS 109) socio-scientific interdiscipline. Although historical analyses of social phenomena are vital for Adorno's sociology, his sociological writings never go as far as current proposals to reunify the disciplines of twenty-first-century social science around the 'singular task [of] . . . historical social science' with 'process . . . at the centre of the methodology' (Wallerstein 2000: 34). Adorno exploits intersections between separate fields of interest which emerge on specific methodological and substantive sites for his sociology. These intersections do not always amount to agreement. Perspectives from different arenas fertilise and challenge one another. For example, while the theory of mimesis in art can support sociology's endeavour to express aspects of social reality in writing, epistemological considerations undermine sociology's reliance on empirical material. In her recent inquiry into the cultural turn in cultural science, Bachmann-Medick (2006: 257) proposes to examine 'zones of contact, overlap, but also conflict between disciplines'. 'In contradistinction to the "smoother" category of interdisciplinarity', such an examination could highlight and operationalise the 'differences, tensions and conflicts . . . between disciplines and directions of research'. Adorno's reflections on sociology's disciplinary boundaries resonate more consonantly with this proposal than with notions of a purified sociology on the one hand or conceptions of inter- and post-disciplinarity on the other. These reflections, together with his extensive efforts to negotiate disciplinary divisions in research practice, continue to provide unconventional perspectives on highly topical questions.

Further support for demarcating Adorno's sociological work emerges from an argument which *prima vista* seems to undermine such a demarcation. Due to social integration, Adorno holds, nothing under the sun can be thought unless it is thought with reference to exchange society. Strictly speaking, even a 'non-social' reality – if traces of it still exist – is characterised by its distinction from society. Since exchange society thus affects the objects of a whole array of different research areas (including artworks and philosophical problems), scientists across the disciplinary spectrum are compelled to disrespect disciplinary boundaries to some extent and look for 'interdisciplinary methods' (1972: 127): 'by relating the subject matter of scholarship back to the whole, which is society', 'sociology' constitutes 'an attempt . . . to remedy the scholarly division of labour'. However, for reasons outlined above, this attempt is 'necessarily limited and partial' (IS 108). Indeed, with the advancement of social integration, reflection upon the social dimension of different phenomena becomes an important scientific task in its own right. For Adorno, this is sociology's task. Exchange society – omnipresent and elusive, rather than a substantive area which could be demarcated – does not define the

borders of the sociological discipline. Adorno disagrees with Durkheim's (1982) conviction that sociology can be framed with a view to social facts as designated research objects. Instead, the problem of examining exchange society in its impact upon a whole variety of phenomena, the methodical and conceptual devices used for tackling such investigations in different substantive domains and the broader thematic areas within which these devices are developed are, in the first instance, specifically sociological. In the second instance, sociology is open to inspiration from – and in turn gives impulses to – other disciplines. In this precise sense, one may legitimately speak of Adorno's sociology and also of his sociology of society.

Adorno's sociological work is neither exhaustive of a complete sociological methodology nor encompassed by, or founded upon, a set of general categories or basic principles. Instead, the conceptual configurations around the various sociological themes explored in this book contain a recurrent motif, sociology's double character. Surfacing in different guises in several contexts, this motif has been threading its way through the discussions on an often-interrupted course. Honneth (2005b: 165–7) recently undermined his earlier critique of Adorno, arguing that it could be upheld only if Adorno's social theory were understood as an 'explanatory theory' of capitalism. Yet Adorno's theory must be read as a hermeneutic of capitalism. Adorno, Honneth (2005b: 168, 173) explains, accepts that capitalist exchange society appears to individuals as opaque second nature because social relations are reified. Social analysis must register this 'retransformation [Rückverwandlung] of the social into nature' (2005b: 169). According to Adorno, Honneth (2005b: 174) continues, 'generalis[ed] . . . commodity exchange' conditions a 'deformation of reason'. Informed by Weber's methodology, Adorno aims to interpret empirical material by reordering, accentuating, exaggerating and stylising certain of its features in order to construct ideal-typical figures of those deformed patterns of thought and action (2005b: 166, 171–2, 176–9). Finally, Honneth (2005b: 167) emphasises, Adorno sets himself the 'difficult task' of remaining aware of 'the possibility of a transformability of the ossified, reified reality'. This 'natural-historical' orientation of social theory is consistent with sociology's double character. In what follows, I will bring this motif into focus once more, argue that it renders Adorno's social analysis considerably more problematic than Honneth's sketch suggests, and draw conclusions from these problems.

The double character of Adorno's sociology responds to the condition of exchange society. Social integration occasions the adjustment of objects and humans to the exchange principle and their homogenisation with reference to exchange value. Dominated by commodity exchange

relations, humans treat their labour products, other humans and themselves as things, and live their social relations like relations between things. Social conditions are reified and take on the appearance of nature. Moreover, integration as total adaptation entails that all human thought and action undeviatingly serves society's reproduction. Although it is maintained by humans alone, society comes to function automatically, as if it were autonomous, 'assert[ing] itself over their heads as a blind and almost unavoidable fate' (HF 27). The solidified social whole operates just like an objective, invariable mechanism: 'it is of the essence of historical objectivity that what was made by humans, institutions in the widest sense . . ., are made independent of humans and come to form a second nature' (HF 161). Capitalist social conditions are estranged from individuals, confronting them as opaque, immutable authority. Social analysis must capture social estrangement and the underlying reification and galvanisation of social relations and mechanisms.

Yet no matter how thing-like a society assimilated living activity creates, the petrified whole is maintained precisely by human activity executing historical processes. 'The solidified institutions, the relations of production, are . . . even as omnipotent ones something made by humans, something revocable' (HF 162). Hence sociology must simultaneously strive to negate the instructive perspective of objective, invariant nature and find ways of deciphering society as the historically generated, humanly reproduced reality that it is. 'Only an experience which, without hastily ensuring and blinding itself by means of existing theorems, still succeeds in perceiving transformations in the physiognomy of society can aid the approach of its overdue theory' (SSI 194).

Responding to his formulations of this double task in different thematic contexts, Adorno's sociology develops its double character in various manifestations. Chapters 1 and 3 saw Adorno's sociology aim for double *perspectives* of society's estranged, petrified character and its historical, humanly maintained reality. His attempts to meet this objective inform his analyses of the social dimension of particular phenomena and his methodological investigations of the problems and potentials of empirical and theoretical social research. Sociology's double character also reverberates in its *socio-critical* dimension. Registering estrangement in the coagulated condition constitutes one way of recognising social suffering, condemning society and urging its transformation. Capturing society as a revocable reality, in turn, is vital for counteracting capitulation on the part of those who, alone, are capable of social change. One of the questions guiding Adorno's reflections on sociological writing is how sociologists can *articulate* their double perspective on exchange society. Dissatisfied with conceptual identification, Adorno experiments with mimetic expressions of

the galvanised status quo. He wants to achieve in writing what he once observed of Freud: to 'mak[e] himself as solid as the petrified conditions' – yet always 'so as to break them' (SSI 37; see also Cook 2004a: 44–5). Every articulation of petrifaction also calls for its reconfiguration with the aim of presenting social relations as historical phenomena prone to human intervention.

It is difficult to avoid the impression that the first element of sociology's double task – recognising, portraying, condemning the petrified whole – is more readily accomplishable for Adorno's sociology than its second element. Adorno interprets a host of empirical instances of intellectual and physical behaviour – from running after a bus to swallowing public opinion, from reading astrology to fearing death – partly as reactions to an opaque social world confronting individuals as autonomous, objective, invariant authority. He also deciphers a number of sociological, philosophical and aesthetic concepts – Durkheim's *fait social*, Lukács's 'second nature', Marx's 'natural laws', Husserl's 'essence', Benjamin's 'fate' and 'myth' – as articulations of (among other aspects) estrangement in a galvanised society. Furthermore, these conditions come into view in negations of some socially determined empirical observations and putative experiences of a reality outside of exchange society. Adorno highlights ways of textually presenting – especially, given the atrophy of the respective concepts, of expressing – estrangement and reification. And although usually direct observations are untrustworthy, he indicates that even immediate confrontations with society 'where it hurts' pick up weak, distorted signals of the coagulated, impenetrable whole.

Adorno seems to have much greater difficulties establishing and presenting comprehensive perspectives on society's human, historical, transformable reality. Is it fair to say that Adorno, who challenged purely abstract conceptions of history such as Heidegger's (1962: 424–55) 'ahistoric' historicism with a 'concrete and material history', eventually let concrete history 'evaporate' into abstractions similar to Heidegger's (Krahl 1974: 166)? Can Adorno's sociology offer nothing but the 'word-magic' of an 'overtax[ed]', 'fetishiz[ed]' concept of history (Albert in PD 177)? Is Adorno's sociology prone to his own criticism of the Durkheim school for failing to determine 'collective forms of consciousness and institutions . . . historically' because the 'dialectic of the collective–universal and the individual–particular in society is ignored' (SSI 251)?

These criticisms are certainly sweeping. Adorno's sociological work contains theoretical interpretations of empirical material which seek to underline society's historical process and to show how human actions reproduce society. Where people meticulously calculate presents, personal favours are settled financially, immigrant girls trade their looks for

privileges, colleagues utter an efficient 'hallo', beachgoers lie in the sun, and employees have astrologically prescribed fun, Adorno sees concrete manifestations of the ways in which people live social relations as if they were relations between things and obediently support and extend the exchange principle's reign over social and material reality. Society is reified and solidified by humans in their living activity. Yet these attempts to decipher society as human, historical, transformable often appear to have limited success. Many of Adorno's texts create the impression that the humans in question cannot but carry out those activities in the service of social reproduction, that they are objectively forced to do so, that even society's putatively historical dimension bears little potential for change. The possibility of a social world in which obituaries will not speak of the dead as of things, in which individuals who have lost their love do not feel compelled to take the next best opportunity, in which time not spent in employment does not secretly contribute to capitalist production – is often only insinuated. Moreover, Adorno's indications of society's historical transformability are frequently restricted to suggestions that human thinking, supportive of society, could change and thereby have a socially transformative impact. Adorno's essays on sexual taboos, his philosophy examinees and his educational programme to combat barbarism exemplify this tendency. Of course, for Adorno, thinking, especially identity thinking, plays a major part in socially reproductive living activity – hence his interest in reified consciousness. But thinking alone does not reproduce society. Honneth (2005b: 166) rightly emphasises Adorno's intention to penetrate the 'second, reified nature of historical reality' by exposing the 'figures of action and consciousness' underpinning it. Yet vis-à-vis this analytical demand, the focus on figures of socially reproductive thought characteristic of much of Adorno's sociology is problematic. As long as only the potential to change human thinking is made explicit, society's transformability is only presented from one important angle. Finally, the historical dimension of sociological thinking itself is usually only partially decoded.[3] Correspondingly, while Adorno's theory of society has at its disposal a broad spectrum of concepts capable of highlighting, intellectual processes capable of recognising and configurations capable of expressing estrangement and petrifaction, this spectrum is much narrower for society's historical reality. Many passages either make do with negating the various appearances of society as essence, nature or object – 'not a thing', 'no invariant' – or with indeed regularly

[3] Chapters 3 and 4 highlighted the implications of the obstacles to deciphering sociology's empirical reconstructions and normative categories for theoretical analysis and social critique.

abstract reassurances that society is historical: 'has become', 'has been created by humans', 'is reproduced by individuals' and 'bears the potential for change'.

If these predicaments corroborated the criticisms cited above, they would cast serious doubt on the need, or even just the benefit, of re-engaging with Adorno's sociological thought today. The shortcomings of Adorno's sociology could be seen as reducible to theoretical, perhaps psychological predicaments of the sociologist and his thinking. Sociologists would be equipped with a striking argument for relegating Adorno's recalcitrant visions for the discipline to the museum. Although the problems associated with the double character of Adorno's sociology are undeniable, they seem to urge concluding differently.

For Adorno, capitalism is a condition of social integration. The social condition, reified and solidified to the point of appearing as invariant objectivity, governs ever more aspects of reality. It leaves its mark on ever more material and intellectual phenomena, increasingly pesters thought processes and practices, urges for expression from underneath a growing number of textual passages, and can therefore now hardly be avoided by the subject analysing its surroundings. Socialisation increasingly obstructs the subject's penetration of the objective façade of its social environment and the endeavour to make its historical processes executed by humans transparent. From 'the standpoint of radical estrangement' of Beckett's characters (Adorno *et al.* 1994: 108), Adorno explains, '[h]istory is omitted because it has dried up consciousness's power to think history' (NLI 247). Sociologists and their discipline, crucially, cannot fully escape this social climate: sociology is concerned *with* society as well as taking place *within* it; exchange society confronts sociology as a reality to be examined and suffuses every facet of sociological research, including its questions, observations, concepts, practices and articulations. Adorno diagnoses the predicament of an integrated, omnipresent and galvanised condition; the dilemma that the 'objective regularity undoubtedly plays the primordial role in society'; that everywhere 'the objective, institutional side of society has detached itself from and solidified in relation to the people of whom society is made up' (IS 151). It is this *social* predicament that finds expression in the putatively purely intellectual shortcomings of sociology: in sociology's readiness to capture society in its appearance as objectivity and in sociology's coinciding difficulties to decipher society as human and historical. The mindset of Beckett's dramatis personae – 'I am so estranged that I cannot speak in any other way than this' (Adorno *et al.* 1994: 109) – is not foreign to the sociologist of exchange society, who is distinguished from those *personae* by the struggle against society's mystification as nature and essence.

A 'certain condition of ... subjects', Adorno reminds his sociology students, 'is needed in order that society can survive in its existing form. If the subjects were different ... society could probably not survive as it does'. The 'subject is the potential ... by which this society can change'. Hence 'the recognition of the reification of society should not be ... reified'. Sociology must also 'concern itself with the relationship between the system and human beings' (IS 151–2). Yet this relationship further infringes on sociological research. In the current conditions, the individuals producing social relations face a petrified society which decides upon their survival and appears to them as intransigent nature. Thus individuals see no option apart from obeying and maintaining existing conditions. This leads them to carry out the reproduction of society as though they could not do otherwise, as though they were naturally compelled to conform, and as though they had no potential by which society could change. It is due to this *social* predicament that sociology's endeavour to decipher society as a historical, transformable product of living humans is further compromised: that sociology's portrayals of the human practices maintaining society end up depicting these practices as unavoidable and objectively determined; and that even sociology's expositions of society's ostensibly historical dimension seldom amount to persuasive outlines of possibilities for change.

Sociology's double character reflects a wider context of problems. Adorno's sociological writings are unsatisfying even where they keep the imbalance in sociology's double perspective on society to a minimum. The presentation of society with regards to its major aspects as both an invariant object, which lets social petrifaction shine forth, and as a human, historical product, which is supposed to indicate its transformability, sustains two conflicting perspectives. It is a 'contradiction' that 'what asserts itself over and above humans asserts itself by virtue of' these very humans. Yet for Adorno, this ostensibly 'logical contradiction' is not 'merely the product of an inadequate formulation' – i.e. not purely logical. The 'contradiction ... arises from the situation' (HF 27). The contradiction sustained by social analysis is not an intellectual shortcoming per se, but part and parcel of a sustained engagement with two basic characteristics of a society which deeply affects its scientific examination. In Adorno's view, sociology's double character, expressed by its mutually challenging perspectives on exchange society, is the discipline's most faithful response to a tightly integrated society which, albeit historically generated and maintained by humans, is galvanised to the point of operating like an objective mechanism.

Many of Adorno's texts on exchange society have been shown to reflect society's ongoing elusiveness to the concept's grasp. Sociological

interpretation offers perspectives on social mechanisms and conditions operant behind the factual façade, but these perspectives are often difficult to reconcile. Adorno constantly qualifies and revises his theoretical assertions on phenomena in their social mediation, regularly leaving incompatible statements unresolved. Once more, however, these sociological quandaries are not purely sociological. As far as Adorno is concerned, they, too, have a decisive *social* dimension: the integrative tendency of society itself bolsters its resistance to sociological examination. This is not only the case insofar as socialisation creates a solidified social world whose historical reality is increasingly difficult to decipher and whose contradictory tendencies cannot be conceptually resolved. Several passages in Adorno's work additionally indicate that advancing socialisation ensnares more and more of humankind's intellectual and material reality, cocooning the world in a complexly entangled, dense web of economic and social relations, ideologies, and apparatuses of production, distribution and domination.

It is undeniable that Adorno's sociology, rarely capable of fully accomplishing the aims it sets itself, is ridden with inadequacies, conflicts, even contradictions. In every respect, Adorno's work places greater emphasis on the problems confronting sociology in each of its domains than on sociology's potential for examining society successfully. Even Adorno's references to sociology's potential are inseparable from indications of further problems. Dismissing this unbending concern with sociology's predicaments as uninspiring and constraining; reducing the furrows and ruptures in Adorno's sociology of exchange society to a flawed conception of sociology; archiving his sociological writings as out of step with recent conceptions of the discipline: all of this might help sociologists in justifying the removal of the intellectual obstacles his work places in the discipline's advance into the twenty-first century.

However, such gestures cannot avoid appearing uncomfortable. For Adorno, the problems besetting sociology are irreducible to an autonomous subject and the flaws of its reasoning. Socially conditioned, these predicaments erupt on the surface of sociological thought not as a result of sociology's insufficiencies but during the formation of a radically sociological perspective on sociology's confrontation with, and mediation by, the social reality it seeks to examine. The recalcitrance of Adorno's vision for sociology and the quandaries of his numerous attempts to analyse social life in exchange society tell of a tortured response to the society with which sociology is concerned and wherein it takes place (see also SoI 184). And so the danger emerges that relief from Adorno's sociology and its hostility to the course of time ensues from mistaking the removal of its intellectual discrepancies for overcoming the underlying obstacles. No

sooner are such intellectual discrepancies removed than thought enters the service of the prevailing social conditions unawares. The possibility of overcoming the social obstructions to sociological analysis hinges on tackling precisely the task that Adorno left sociology: a critical examination of exchange society that enables its transformation.

Appendix: Adorno's sociology in chronological perspective

Information for this chronology was collected from Müller-Doohm (2009), Schütte (2003), Wiggershaus (1987, 1994) and Tiedemann's editorials in Adorno's (2003b) *Gesammelte Schriften*.

1903	Theodor Ludwig Wiesengrund-Adorno born 11 September, Frankfurt am Main. Parents: Oscar Wiesengrund, wine merchant, and Maria, née Calvelli-Adorno della Piana, singer.
1913–21	Secondary education at Kaiser Wilhelms-Gymnasium in Frankfurt. Studies composition and piano at Hoch'sches Konservatorium. Begins to publish music and literary criticism. Begins work as a composer.[1] Siegfried Kracauer, fourteen years his senior, becomes Adorno's friend and mentor.
1921–4	Studies philosophy, sociology, musicology at University of Frankfurt. Friendship with Leo Löwenthal.
1922	Friendship with Max Horkheimer.
1923	Friendship with Walter Benjamin. Foundation of the Institute for Social Research.
1923–66	Correspondence with Kracauer.
1924	Doctoral thesis on Husserl (supervisor Hans Cornelius) (GS1).
1925	Studies composition with Alban Berg in Vienna. Contacts with Arnold Schönberg circle.
1925–35	Correspondence with Berg.
1926–31	Studies philosophy at Frankfurt.
1927–69	Correspondence with Horkheimer.
1928–40	Correspondence with Benjamin.
1931	Horkheimer becomes the Institute's director. Adorno completes habilitation on Kierkegaard (supervisor Paul Tillich).

[1] See a list of compositions in Müller Doohm 2003: 951 8.

	Inaugural lecture at Frankfurt 'The Actuality of Philosophy'. 'Words without Songs' (VSII).
1931–3	Teaches philosophy and aesthetics. Seminars on Benjamin's *Origin of German Tragic Drama*.
1932	Lecture 'The Idea of Natural-History' (published posthumously). 'On the Social Situation of Music' (GS18).
1933	National Socialists gain power in Germany. Institute closed, eventually reopened in New York. Adorno loses his license to teach. Gestapo search his house. *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*.
1934	Emigrates to London.
1935–8	Advanced Student (philosophy) at Oxford University.
1936	'On Jazz' (GS17).
1936–69	Correspondence with Alfred Sohn-Rethel.
1937	Marries Margarethe Karplus. 'New Value-free Sociology' (VSI) (on Karl Mannheim; revised version published 1953 (P)). 'On the Philosophy of Husserl' (VSI) (published posthumously).
1938	Moves to New York; joins the Institute. 'On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression in Listening'.
1938–40	Director of Music Study of Paul Lazarsfeld's Princeton Radio Research Project.
1939	Prepares the Institute's research on anti-Semitism.
1940	Full Institute member. 'No Adventure' (VSII) (published posthumously).
1941	Joins Horkheimer in Los Angeles. 'On Popular Music'. 'The Radio Symphony'. 'Veblen's Attack on Culture'. 'Spengler after the Decline' (based on a 1938 lecture).
1942	'Reflections on Class Theory' (published posthumously). 'Theses on Need' (SSI) (published posthumously).
1943	'The Psychological Technique of Martin Luther Thomas' Radio Addresses' (published posthumously).
1943–50	Collaborative research leading to *The Authoritarian Personality* (with Else Frenkel-Brunswick, Daniel J. Levinson, R. Nevitt Sanford).
1944	*Dialectic of Enlightenment* (with Horkheimer).
1945	Lecture 'Questions to Intellectual Emigration' (VSI) (published posthumously) at Los Angeles Jewish Club. 'A Social Critique of Radio Music'.
1946	'Anti-Semitism and Fascist Propaganda'.
1949	Temporary return to Frankfurt. Teaches at University of Frankfurt. 'Cultural Criticism and Society' (published 1951). 'Ad Lukács' (VSI) (published posthumously). 'Democratic

Leadership and Mass Manipulation' (VSI). *Philosophy of Modern Music*.

1950 Involved in the Institute's reopening in Frankfurt. Begins intensive editorial work on Benjamin's *oeuvre*. 'A Portrait of Walter Benjamin'.

1950–5 Collaborative research for *Group Experiment*.

1951 Promotes empirical sociology in Germany. *Minima Moralia* (mainly written in the 1940s). 'Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda'. 'Aldous Huxley and Utopia' (based on a 1942 seminar). 'Almost Too Serious' (VSII).

1952 'Revised Psychoanalysis' (SSI) (based on a San Francisco lecture). 'On the Present Position of Empirical Social Research in Germany' (SSI). 'Public Opinion and Opinion Research' (VSI) (published posthumously). *In Search of Wagner*.

1952–3 Temporary return to USA. Research Director of Hacker Foundation. 'The Stars Down to Earth' (published 1957).

1953 Returns to Germany. Extraordinary Professor of Philosophy and Sociology at Frankfurt. 'Television as Ideology' (CM). 'Individual and Organisation' (SSI). 'On Technology and Humanism' (VSI).

1954 Pedagogic essay 'Empirical Social Research' (GS9.2) (with several co-authors) for *Concise Dictionary of the Social Sciences*. 'How to Look at Television'. 'Remarks on Politics and Neurosis' (SSI). 'Contribution to the Study of Ideology' (SSI). 'Glimpsed in Mid-air' (VSII).

1954–69 Teaches sociology seminars in almost every semester: introduction, basic concepts, sociological and social theory, epistemological and methodological issues, empirical methods, qualitative research, research practice, the individual and society, social conflict, the authoritarian personality, structuralism, sociology of: ideology, art, music, education.[2]

1955 *Prisms*. 'Sociology and Psychology' (SSI). '"Corporate Climate" and Estrangement' (VSII) (published posthumously). 'Introduction to Benjamin's *Schriften*'. Institute publishes Mannesman study.

1955–68 Edits *Frankfurt Contributions to Sociology* (with Walter Dirks, Ludwig von Friedeburg).

1956 Contribution to Amsterdam sociology conference inspires '"Static" and "Dynamic" as Sociological Categories' (published

[2] See Adorno's teaching schedule in Müller Doohm 2003: 944 50.

in different versions 1956, 1961). *Against Epistemology* (partly based on Oxford studies).

1957 Full professor of Philosophy and Sociology at Frankfurt. 'Sociology and Empirical Research' (PD). 'Teamwork in Social Research' (SSI) (published posthumously).

1958 Horkheimer retires. Vice-Director Adorno becomes the Institute's director. Begins deep engagement with Samuel Beckett's work. *Notes to Literature*, vol. I (includes 'The Essay as Form'). 'Scribbled in the Jeu de Paume' (OL).

1959 'On the Present State of German Sociology' (SSI). 'Theory of Pseudo-Culture'. 'The Meaning of Working Through the Past'.

1960 'Culture and Administration'. *Mahler*: *A Musical Physiognomy*.

1961 Lecture 'On the Logic of the Social Sciences' (published 1962) in reply to Karl Popper's 'The Logic of the Social Sciences' at Tübingen conference triggers the Positivist Dispute in German Sociology. 'Opinion Delusion Society'. *Notes to Literature*, vol. II (includes 'Trying to Understand *Endgame*').

1962 *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*. 'Commitment'. 'Philosophy and Teacher' (based on 1961 radio lecture). *Sociologica II* (with Horkheimer). 'Those Twenties'. 'On Combating Anti-Semitism Today' (VSI).

1963 'Sexual Taboos and Law Today'. *Interventions: Nine Critical Models* (CM). *Hegel: Three Studies*. 'The Culture Industry Reconsidered' (OL). 'Lucca Memorial' (OL).

1963–8 Chair of the German Society for Sociology (succeeded by Ralf Dahrendorf).

1963–9 Participates in four radio conversations on education, debarbarisation, maturity.

1964 Co-organises Fifteenth German Sociology Conference. Lecture series *Philosophical Elements of a Theory of Society* (PETG). Lecture series *History and Freedom*. 'Opinion Research and the Public Sphere' (SSI) (published posthumously). 'The Curious Realist: On Siegfried Kracauer'. 'Progress' (based on 1962 lecture). *Jargon of Authenticity*.

1965 Radio dispute with Arnold Gehlen, 'Is Sociology a Science of the Human Being?' (ISW) (published posthumously). Lecture series *Metaphysics*. 'Note on Socio-scientific Objectivity' (SSI). 'On the Question "What Is German?"'. *Notes to Literature*, vol. III.

1966 *Negative Dialectics*. Encyclopaedia entry 'Society'. 'Amorbach' (OL). 'From Sils Maria' (OL). 'Benjamin the Letter Writer'.

1967	Introduction to Emile Durkheim's *Sociology and Philosophy* (German translation) (SSI). *Ohne Leitbild* (precursor to *Aesthetic Theory*). 'Theses on the Sociology of Art' (based on 1965 lecture). 'Education after Auschwitz' (based on 1967 radio lecture). 'Uromi' (VSII).
1967–9	Repeated clashes with student activists, often during lectures.
1968	Joins protests against 'emergency laws'. Co-organises Sixteenth German Sociology Conference; introductory lecture 'Late Capitalism or Industrial Society?'; edits proceedings (published 1969). Lecture series *Introduction to Sociology*. Results of seminars on laughter and social conflict published as 'Notes on Social Conflict Today' (with Ursula Jaerisch) (SSI). 'Scientific Experiences of a European Scholar in America'. *Alban Berg: Master of the Smallest Link* (partly written in previous decades).
1969	Radio lecture 'Free Time'. *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology* (with Hans Albert, Ralf Dahrendorf, Jürgen Habermas, Harald Pilot, Karl Popper). 'Social Theory and Empirical Research' (SSI) (published posthumously). 'Marginalia to Theory and Praxis'. *Catchwords: Critical Models II* (CM). 'Critique'. 'Resignation'. Dies 6 August in Visp, Switzerland.
1970	*Aesthetic Theory*.
1974	*Notes to Literature*, vol. IV.

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1940. 'Husserl and the Problem of Idealism', *Journal of Philosophy* 37(1): 5 18

1941. 'On Popular Music', *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science* 9(1): 17 48

1945. 'A Social Critique of Radio Music', *Kenyon Review* 7(2): 208 17

1954. 'How to Look at Television', *Quarterly of Film, Radio and Television* 3: 213 35

1960. 'Große Blochmusik', *Neue Deutsche Hefte* 69: 14 26

1961. '"Static" and "Dynamic" as Sociological Categories', trans. H. Kaal, *Diogenes* 9(33): 28 49

1967. 'Sociology and Psychology', trans. I. N. Wohlfarth, *New Left Review* 46: 67 80

1968. 'Sociology and Psychology II', trans. I. N. Wohlfarth, *New Left Review* 47: 79 97

1969a. 'Society', trans. F. Jameson, *Salmagundi* 10 11: 144 53

(ed.) 1969b. *Spätkapitalismus oder Industriegesellschaft? Verhandlungen des 16. deutschen Soziologentages*. Stuttgart: Ferdinand Enke Verlag

1971. *Erziehung zur Mündigkeit*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp

1972. 'Theses on the Sociology of Art', trans. B. Trench, *Working Papers in Cultural Studies* 2: 121 8.

1973a. *The Jargon of Authenticity*, trans. K. Ranowski and F. Will. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul

1973b. *Philosophische Terminologie. Zur Einleitung*. Vol. I. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp

1973c. *Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. A. G. Mitchell and W. V. Bloomster. London: Sheed & Ward

1974. *Philosophische Terminologie. Zur Einleitung*. Vol. II. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp

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1977. 'The Actuality of Philosophy', *Telos* 31: 120 33

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1979. 'The Radio Symphony', in P. F. Lazarsfeld and F. N. Stanton (eds.) *Radio Research 1941*. New York: Arno Press, 110 39

1982. *Against Epistemology: A Metacritique. Studies in Husserl and the Phenomenological Antinomies*, trans. W. Domingo. Oxford: Blackwell
1983. *Prisms*, trans. S. Weber and S. Weber. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press
1989. *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, trans. R. Hullot Kentor. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press
1991a. *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*. London: Routledge
1991b. *Notes to Literature*. Vol. I, trans. S. W. Nicholsen. New York: Columbia University Press
1992a. *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy*, trans. E. Jephcott. University of Chicago Press
1992b. *Notes to Literature*. Vol. II, trans. S. W. Nicholsen. New York: Columbia University Press
1993a. 'Der Begriff der Philosophie. Vorlesung Wintersemester 1951/52. Mitschrift von Kraft Bretschneider', in *Frankfurter Adorno Blätter*. Vol. II, ed. Theodor W. Adorno Archiv. Munich: edition text + kritik, 9 90
1993b. *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. S. W. Nicholsen. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press
1993c. 'Theory of Pseudo Culture', trans. D. Cook, *Telos* 95: 15 38
1994. 'Elf Nachträge zu den Gesammelten Schriften', in *Frankfurter Adorno Blätter*. Vol. III, ed. Theodor W. Adorno Archiv. Munich: edition text + kritik, 135 47
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1998b. *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. H. Pickford. New York: Columbia University Press
1998c. *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. R. Livingstone. London: Verso
1999. *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. R. Hullot Kentor. London: Athlone Press
2000a. *Introduction to Sociology*, trans. E. Jephcott. Stanford University Press
2000b. *Metaphysics: Concept and Problems*, trans. E. Jephcott. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press
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2002b. *The Stars Down to Earth and Other Essays on the Irrational in Culture*. London: Routledge
2002c. 'Who's Afraid of the Ivory Tower?', trans. G. Richter, *Monatshefte* 94(1): 10 23.
2003a. *Can One Live after Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*, trans. R. Livingstone *et al.* Stanford University Press
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