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ADORNO, NON-IDENTITY, SEXUALITY

Marcel Stoetzler

This chapter explores some of Adorno's scattered remarks on love, on the gender relation between men and women, as well as on homosexuality, and how these relate to modern individuality, subjectivity and the capitalist mode of production. Its focus is on the modernity of the idea that there are exactly two sexes, understood as two distinct species or essences, and some of the implications and reverberations of this idea. It proceeds by way of arranging (juxtaposing perhaps) a number of related arguments taken from a body of Marxist writing mostly from the 1970s and 1980s that seems, if not influenced by, then at least compatible with, Adorno's theorising. The guiding idea is that strict sexual dimorphism is an aspect, or expression, of the increasingly genital organisation of sexuality on the one hand, and on the other, the sublimation of Eros in the service of capitalist real subsumption. Both have been, and still are, part of the same historical process.

ECHO; ABANDON

“There is no love that is not an echo”; happiness is “what is not exchangeable, not open to complaint” (Adorno 1974, 1994, s.139). “It is a piece of sexual utopia not to be oneself, and to love more in the beloved than only her” (Adorno 1964: 104–5; 1998: 75). Love suggests “the negation of the ego principle,” the negation of “the demand for identity” (1998: 75). “The genital fixation on

the I and on the other, who is thought of as equally consistent in her/himself, harbours narcissism” (Adorno 1964: 105).

When bourgeois love and marriage in their initial stages seemed to promise freedom, the exit from “servitude in the father’s house,”¹ in the period of “big industry” conditions have changed to such an extent that “[d]efiance of the family is no more an act of daring than the leisure-time relationship with the *boy-friend*² is the gateway to heaven” (Adorno and Horkheimer 1971: 97; 1997: 107; 2002: 84). People adopt a “rational, calculating attitude to their own sexuality” based on a more casual but all the more effective version of the radical separation of mind and body that underlies the libertinage celebrated by de Sade in the short summer of bourgeois radicalism, the period of the French Revolution: “Love and pleasure are very different things ... for the sentiments of tenderness correspond to the conditions of humor and convenience, but are in no way dependent on the beauty of a neck or a handsomely curved hip” (de Sade, quoted in Adorno and Horkheimer 1997: 108). De Sade’s reasoning – a Cartesianism carried to absurd extremes, and indeed turned against its own emancipatory intent – is wrong, as Adorno and Horkheimer show (and as Adorno, 1973: 97–122, 2006: 61–72, would later develop in his discussion of “natural beauty” in *Aesthetic Theory*), de Sade’s Cartesianism “diminishes not only the utopian exuberance of love but its physical pleasure” (Adorno and Horkheimer 1997: 109):

The beauty of a neck and the curve of a hip do not act on sexuality as a-historical, purely natural facts, but as images which comprise all social experience. In this experience there survives an intention of something other than nature, of love which is not restricted to sex. (Adorno and Horkheimer 1971: 98; 1997: 108; 2002: 85)

Not even physical pleasure is actually *physis*, but its actual, namely social, content is congealed historical experience, including a moment of intimation of utopia, the better state of things, projected by the beholder onto the “beautifully” curved hip. Adorno and Horkheimer may have had in mind here the Shakespeare quote with which Marx concluded the chapter on

fetishism in the first volume of *Capital*: to be good-looking is a matter of circumstance, while reading and writing come by nature (Marx 1990: 177).³

“Nothing pleased Adorno more than when a friend came to similar insights independently, for he considered it a validation of their correctness” (Buck-Morss 1977: 85). Adorno might have been pleased to read, then, that Mario Mieli, one of the founders of the radical gay movement in England and Italy in the 1970s and advocate of “gay communism,” came – by a different route – to the similar conclusion that “love is the tendency to annihilate the outworn neurotic and egoistic categories of ‘subject’ and ‘object’” (Mieli 1980: 56).⁴ Or the French communist Dominique Karamazov’s demand (published in French in the same year as Mieli’s Italian text, 1977) that “the sexual” be dissolved in loving relationships rather than conceptually separated from “love”. In capitalist society, “tenderness and esteem only prepare for or accompany sex and even constitute a form of barter” on the terms of x amount of tenderness for y amount of sexual availability (Karamazov 1998: 31). “Abandon, the submission which a loving relationship implies, unaccepted because it is in contradiction with a whole way of life” – the everyday reality of ubiquitous exchange of equivalents – “returns in the form of an exterior domination that is violent, imposed, feared and desired at the same time” (1983: 33):

For Hite & Co., sexual relations are reduced to helping each other towards pleasure, to rendering each other a service, naturally blending the sauce with the indispensable tenderness. Reciprocal masturbation would be the ideal. What escapes them is the possibility of self-abandonment in the other If it is just a matter of the intensity of pleasure, then there can be no doubt that the electronic feeling and sucking machine will win out over masturbation nine times out of ten. (1983: 40)⁵

On this account, all late-bourgeois subjects seem to be dreaming of being so many de Sades, but – due to the reality principle of exchange of equivalents – have to take some limited amount of tenderness into the bargain: an instance of bourgeois society’s celebrated capacity to civilise and domesticate the barbarisms that

it produces in the first place. Karamazov, like Adorno, defends, in Marxian language, the revolutionary dimension of romanticism against the instrumental logic of left-liberal utilitarianism, which suggests the quantification and accumulation of pleasure and the exchange of equivalent portions of it, based on the calculus of mutual benefit. For Adorno, the “misshapen bourgeois form of sex, murkily enmeshed with every kind of material interest,” “marriage as an ignoble compromise,” “the institutional, permitted, assimilated character of pleasure, its false immanence in an order that cuts it to shape and imparts to it in the very moment of ordaining it a deathly melancholy,” creates “repugnance” which may even lead ecstasy “to withdraw completely into renunciation, rather than sin by realization against its own principle.” Although, however, “fidelity exacted by society is a means to unfreedom,” “only through fidelity can freedom achieve insubordination to society’s command” (Adorno 1974, s.113).

Developed capitalism is bad news for romantic love. The “integration of society ... designates subjects more and more exclusively as partial moments in the network of material production” to the effect that “the organic composition of man is growing” (1974, s.147): “that which determines subjects as means of production and not as living purposes, increases with the proportion of machines to variable capital.” The “process that begins with the metamorphosis of labour-power into a commodity has permeated men through and through and objectified each of their impulses as formally commensurable variations of the exchange relationship.”

Under the a priori demand for saleability the living has made itself, as something living, a thing, equipment. The ego consciously takes the whole man into its service as a piece of apparatus. In this re-organization the ego as business-manager delegates so much of itself to the ego as business-mechanism, that it becomes quite abstract, a mere reference-point: self-preservation forfeits its self. Character traits ... are no longer the subject; rather, the subject responds to them as to his internal object. ... This is the social pathogenesis of schizophrenia. The severance of character traits both from their instinctual basis and from the self, which commands

them where it formerly merely held them together, causes man to pay for his increasing inner organization with increasing disintegration. The consummation of the division of labour within the individual, his radical objectification, leads to his morbid scission. Hence the 'psychotic character', the anthropological pre-condition of all totalitarian mass-movements. Precisely this transition from firm characteristics to push-button behaviour-patterns ... is an expression of the rising organic composition of man. ... in the prompt, unresistant reflexes the subject is entirely extinguished. (Adorno 1974, s.147)

Adorno holds that love "partially withstood throughout the bourgeois age" the principle of exchange of equivalents, until the present time (writing in 1945) (1974, s.107). "The exchange relationship ... has completely absorbed" love; if love was "the last immediacy," it has fallen "victim to the distance of all the contracting parties from all others. Love is chilled by the value that the ego places on itself." The more libido is being celebrated in society's shop windows, the less it is really able to undergird actual relationships: "The objective dissolution of society is subjectively manifested in the weakening of the erotic urge, no longer able to bind together self-preserving monads" (1974, s.107):

When Casanova [in the eighteenth century] called a woman unprejudiced, he meant that no religious convention prevented her from giving herself; today the unprejudiced woman is the one who no longer believes in love, who will not be hoodwinked into investing more than she can expect in return. ... As the arrangements of life no longer allow time for pleasure conscious of itself, replacing it by the performance of physiological functions, de-inhibited sex is itself de-sexualized. (1974, s.107)⁶

The presence of continuing an ever-renewed exploitation (sexual and otherwise) keeps alive and actualises the memory of violence and forces the individual to adopt the self-protective, calculating utilitarianism of fair and equal exchange of pleasure units. The reality of love under such social conditions destroys love's own basis, abandon:

The experience of pleasure presupposes a limitless readiness to throw oneself away, which is as much beyond women in their fear as men in

their arrogance. Not merely the objective possibility, but also the subjective capacity for happiness, can only be achieved in freedom. (1974, s.55).

In a typical move, acknowledging the relevance of bodily history, including our pre-history as animals, Adorno introduces this statement with the observation, or rather the claim, that female animals undergo copulation “in unfreedom, as objects of violence”:

Women have retained a consciousness of this, particularly among the petty bourgeoisie, down to the late industrial era. ... Society constantly casts woman’s self-abandon back into the sacrificial situation from which it freed her.

We are thrown back here to the familiar dialectic of bourgeois society: according to its own standards, it makes possible the ability for loving echo and abandon for the first time in human history, but, as it denies these possibilities in the same breath, it destroys not only the potential for transcendence that it provides, but even the basis of actual “experience of pleasure” *tout court*.⁷ “No emancipation without that of society” (1974, s.111).

GENITALITY; NATURE

Adorno observed, apparently in the male environs of an English club, that whisky-drinking, cigar-smoking “he-men” despise women because they do not smell of smoke, leather and shaving cream: “In the process of its disintegration, the subject negates everything which is not of its own kind” [*Während das Subjekt zugrunde geht, negiert es alles, was nicht seiner eigenen Art ist*]. To these masochistic men, “repressed homosexuality present[s] itself as the only approved form of heterosexuality” (1974, s. 24).⁸ “He-men” are not capable of either.

It appears that thinking about sexuality has always been fundamentally shaped by the obvious but perplexing way in which the sexual act confounds, or burdens, lust with procreation. It is easy to see that lust would tend to inhabit the realm of freedom and spirit, procreation that of necessity and matter. This cannot

but reverberate with the social fact that the concepts “man” and “woman” are similarly charged. The conceptual dichotomy of nature and spirit, matter and form is rooted in “the wish to escape nature on which though, one’s life depends” (Krahl 1971: 116).⁹ It was formulated in Ancient Greece when human domination over nature was not yet complete and irreversible. Spirit is conceived of as pure and identical with itself out of (wishful) denial of the fact that human life and freedom independent of matter and nature are impossible, i.e. denial of the fact of spirit’s non-identity with itself. This strategy of denial is bolstered by the attempt to think of society and culture as “anchored in natural [*naturwüchsige*] relationships between humans in order to make the former appear as irreversible and indestructible as the latter.” In Platonic philosophy the pleasure principle [*Lustprinzip*] and the procreational act are radically separated: the latter is part of the material, soul-less, non-identical world. In the context of still insecure bourgeois domination, “loving women is a disgrace” (Krahl 1971: 117), a procreational necessity, imposed by the “reality principle,” while true love is only homosexual, pederastic love which is not part of the banal procreation of matter. (That men could have non-procreational sex with women did not seem to occur to Plato. The reduction of women to instruments of procreation, and thus their distance from spirit is silently presupposed in this train of thought.) Aristotle, who is more prepared to acknowledge that culture and society need to be mediated with nature, is “well disposed towards heterosexuality.” This seems to reflect increased confidence in culture’s domination of nature: culture (spirit; men) is now confident enough to admit its dependence on nature (matter; women). Krahl writes that only in the nineteenth century did the equation of truth with identity (the notion of spirit’s self-identity as its purity from matter) lose its grip on philosophy. Developed bourgeois society had grown so confident of its domination of nature that it found it safe now to admit (in political economy) that human existence can only be produced in mediation with nature. Paulinian Christianity offered an alternative way of revising the Platonic conception: flesh is “sinful matter” opposed to God’s “pure identity in his trinity,” the

sexual act is “mere duty,” a concession to natural necessity that must not provide pleasure. Non-procreational sexuality (i.e. sex for pleasure) is forbidden; in the Christian framework, differing from the Platonic, only God and Jesus (God’s son) are entitled to (spiritualised) homosexual as well as pederastic, incestuous embrace in love (not to mention the Holy Spirit, who completes the Trinity). “Through this reorientation ... all eroticism turns in Europe into neurosis, repressed homosexuality”; homosexuality is repressed because it is thought to be pure bliss and is therefore illicit. We mortal sinners don’t deserve it.

The crucial contribution of homosexuality to human civilisation lies in its unequivocal assertion of the purposelessness of sexuality. In spite of knowing, it seems to recapture some of the innocence, or naivety, that must have reigned in human sexuality before humans discovered that there was a causal relationship between intercourse and pregnancy. Adorno writes that the homosexual becomes “the portent of a sexuality alienated from its proper purpose” [*Menetekel zweckentfremdeter Sexualität*] (Adorno 1964: 111, 1998: 80). To “alienate” sexuality from its alleged purpose – procreation – is, however, the whole point of its emancipation, and being its “portent” is what gives homosexuality such a prominent place in the debates and struggles about sexuality’s “liberation” and “alienation.” If, however, the emancipation of sexuality can only mean its alienation from what society claims is its purpose, gender dimorphism, too, loses in the process its real basis.

“Woman as an alleged natural being is a product of history which denaturizes [*denaturiert*] her” (Horkheimer and Adorno 1997: 110–11).¹⁰ “Male logic” (a specific instance of what Adorno describes as “identity logic”) refers to women only as representatives of a species that is alleged to represent “nature.” Therewith it denies the “naturalness” of any particular woman which consists – to the extent that meaningful use of the term “naturalness” is possible at all – in her individuality, namely any individual’s identity against his or her identification (as Adorno would later put it in *Negative Dialectic*). In *Minima Moralia* he writes:

The female character and the ideal of femininity, on which it is modelled, are products of masculine society. ... The female character is a negative imprint of domination. But therefore equally bad. Whatever is in the context of bourgeois delusion called nature, is merely the scar of social mutilation. ... what passes for nature in civilization is by its very substance furthest from all nature... femininity is already the effect of the whip. ... Glorification of the feminine character implies the humiliation of all who bear it. (1974, s. 59)

Oscar Wilde famously remarked in “The Soul of Man under Socialism” that “the only thing that one really knows about human nature is that it changes” (quoted in Weeks 1989: 199); it is in the nature of humans to change their own nature – we are *natura naturans* (active nature) as much as *natura naturata* (nature as created). In the nineteenth-century context, the idea was widespread that what makes human beings human is that they have begun to play with their “natural conditions,” “whether one is talking about changing the course of a river or the sexual use of an orifice not naturally ‘intended’ for the purpose” (Anon. nd: 3). In the modernist context “natural” does not mean “unchangeable” but, on the contrary, the natural may be what humans *can* and *ought* to change, and what they already are in the process of changing. This needs to be kept in mind when reading, for example, Marx’s remark, in the 1844 *Manuscripts*, that “the most natural relationship between man and man is the relationship between man and woman” (Marx 1992: 347). Marx explains that

the relationship of *man* to *woman* ... reveals in a *sensuous* form, reduced to an observable *fact*, the extent to which the human essence has become nature for man or nature has become the human essence for man. It is possible to judge from this relationship the entire level of development of mankind. It follows from the character of this relationship how far *man* as a *species-being*, as *man*, has become himself and grasped himself; ... [it] demonstrates the extent to which man’s *natural* behaviour has become *human* or the extent to which his *human* essence has become a *natural* essence for him, the extent to which his *human nature* has become *nature* for him. (Marx 1992: 347)

Marx differentiates here between the *natural* state of “human nature,” which is a quasi-pre-civilisational starting point, and the human nature, or human essence that *becomes* in the process of civilisation. He presents the gender relation as its touchstone. This makes clear that the notion that “man” ought to return to an original “human nature” is nothing but reactionary. Human nature – the humane – *ought to become* the nature of the human world, but it exists as yet only as potentiality, and in the pores and interstices of an inhuman reality. The contemporary form of its inhumanity can to a large extent be captured with the concept of the capitalist mode of production. The following remark on the modern concept of nature, made by Marx in an 1862 letter to Engels, is important here:

It is remarkable how Darwin recognizes among beasts and plants his English society with its divisions of labour, competition, opening up of new markets, “inventions”, and the Malthusian “struggle for existence” ... Hobbes’s “bellum omnium contra omnes” in Darwin the animal kingdom figures as civil society ... (Schmidt 1971: 46)

Darwin reads society into nature, not the other way round. Gilbert Herdt wrote that it has been one of Darwin’s basic assumptions “that sexual behaviour served the purposes of reproduction and selective fitness of individuals in evolution” (Herdt 1996: 25). He stresses that “this emphasis on dimorphism reveals a deeper stress on ‘reproduction’ as a paradigm of science and society.” The emphasis on the concept of reproduction points to the predominant role of political economy for nineteenth-century bourgeois thought: “Theorists who followed Darwin’s consistent emphasis on reproduction typically viewed sexual selection as an innate and natural property of our own species as well” (Herdt 1966: 26). This view included the idea “that ‘male’ and ‘female’ are innate structures in all forms of life, including human beings, and that heterosexuality is the teleologically necessary and highest form of sexual evolution” (Herdt 1966: 27). Even the sex life of flowers was imagined in heterosexual terms.

But the critique of the naturalisation of heterosexuality must avoid the naturalisation of any alternative trajectory. Sartre argued

in *Being and Nothingness* that the conception of “libido in need of release” is based on “a category-mistake about human action.” Connell paraphrased Sartre’s argument as follows:

We act sexually, we become sexual, but we are not constituted from the start as sexual beings. We are not driven, and we cannot act so as to liberate what is in process of being constituted. The goal of radical politics, therefore, cannot be the ‘liberation of sexuality’ from social constraint. We can no more liberate libido than we can liberate the square root of minus one. There is no Thing there to liberate. (Connell 1995: 384)

“Sexuality” cannot be liberated, only individuals can liberate themselves from oppression. Connell stresses that such “liberation” would have to be revolutionary, literally, not metaphorically. It requires the overthrow of institutions, it depends on mass actions and it points to a profoundly altered social order. That a real revolution is involved was perfectly clear to women’s liberation and gay liberation activists and theorists around 1970, and is exactly what has been lost in the evolution of theory ever since. The early formulas of sexual liberation, which drew their model of power and revolution from a bookish Marxism, were implausible. But they had a sound understanding of the depth of change involved (Connell 1995: 390).¹¹

Adorno discussed the connection between the sublimation, integration and genitalisation of sexuality in his essay on “sexual taboos.” “[B]ourgeois society coped with the threat posed by the proletariat by integrating it,” and likewise it integrated “the sexes,” which it institutionalised, domesticated, neutralised and tolerated (Adorno 1964: 100; 1998: 72). “Whatever could not be integrated, the actual spiciness of sex [*das eigentliche sexuelle Aroma*] remains under taboo” (Adorno 1964: 101; 1998: 73). Genital sexuality as the dominant form of sexuality is, according to Freud, the “result of integration” (Adorno 1964: 104). This is an historically specific, impoverished and reduced synthesis of the ensemble of partial libidos and causes the “desexualisation of sexuality” when it makes a taboo, in turn, of the “partial drives” [*Partialtriebe*] (Adorno 1964: 104; 1998: 75). In traditional society, taboos were directed at both the partial

drives and genital sexuality. In the context of “formal freedom” taboos take different forms. The most efficient taboo comes in the shape of liberalisation: “sexuality is usurped by an ideal of naturalness, and in a culture of wholesome outdoor living is reduced as much as possible to pure genitality.” The liberation in the name of naturalness – nudism is a case in point – “fights back any refinement” (Adorno uses the French *raffinement*) in which the partial drives would have their place (Adorno 1964: 105; 1998: 75–6).

The desublimation of the “partial drives” by the de-genitalisation of sexuality is also central to Mario Mieli’s concept of “gay communism.” Mieli argued against both the “identities” of hetero- and homosexuality (and also dismissed “bisexuality” as “nothing more than a rather poor conceptual compromise between those”; Mieli 1980: 53ff). If both homo- and heterosexuality are negations of some aspects of life, “gayness” is the negation of the negation. Mieli draws the parallel to communism as the negation of that “automatic monster,” capital. The political aim of “gay communism” is general gayness whereby the word flips back into its older and broader meaning: happiness. Gay communism includes “new gay relations between women and men ... different from the traditional couple” (Mieli 1980: 211).¹² The “object of the revolutionary struggle of homosexuals is not that of winning social tolerance for gays, but rather the liberation of the homoerotic desire in every human being” (Mieli 1980: 82). The existence of this desire has most famously been stated by Freud: “in all of us, throughout life, the libido normally oscillates between male and female objects” (Mieli 1980: 23).¹³ Repressed homosexual desire is still present, “converted” in many different occasions in which physical contact between members of the same sex is permitted (such as in sport) (Mieli 1980: 123), or where the symbolic more than the actual phallus is celebrated: patriotism and drunkenness, “business partnerships, political rackets, gangs” and the rock star cult, religion (“a universal obsessional neurosis of humanity,” partly, to the extent that God-Father figures are being revered, a result of the child’s desire for the father) (Mieli 1980: 126, 130, 135).

Like the sons of Freud's mystical primitive father, who after uniting in a homosexual bond find the strength to kill him, but are then overtaken by remorse and establish in memory and substitution for the father the totem, the phallic fetish, so the homosexuals who meet in liberation groups are largely powerless against the attack from the superego that immediately assails them, and find themselves forced to establish in their midst leaders, phallic and charismatic figures who "command" them, personifying the authority of the superego that binds every individual member of the group with a sense of guilt. (Mieli 1980: 111–12)

Mieli's reworking of Freud's "myth" applies to all revolutionary and leftist groups, practically all of which consist mostly of men (unless they consist solely of women) drawn together by some obscure, quasi-Platonic desire (to read, for example) and habitually to kill and reinvent fathers, "phallic and charismatic figures."

The case for revolutionary desublimation is somewhat complicated by the discovery of "repressive desublimation" (Marcuse), by way of which "capital enables the unconscious to 'emerge' in alienated forms, in order to subsume it" (Mieli 1980: 119). Mieli points to voyeurism as "one of the most profitable 'perversions' for capital" (1980: 106).

"Perversion" is sold both wholesale and retail, it is studied, classified, valued, marketed, accepted, discussed. ... It becomes culture, science, printed paper, money ... if for millennia, therefore, societies have repressed the so-called "perverse" components of Eros in order to sublimate them in labour, the present system liberalises these "perversions" with a view to their further exploitation in the economic sphere. (Mieli 1980: 208)

According to Mieli, "perversions" *must* be repressed in order to become liberalised and fetishised into marketable sexual consumer products and liveable "identities."¹⁴

TWEEDLEDUM; TWEEDLEDEE

"Freedom would be not to choose between black and white but to abjure such prescribed choices," Adorno writes (1974, s. 85). Is there a case for arguing that one could abjure the

“prescribed choice” between being male and female? Have “man” and “woman” emerged in history and can they be expected to disappear, too?

The French novelist and theorist Monique Wittig made the probably most powerful claim in that direction, pointing for this purpose to Marx’s writing, where dialectical categories

such as the One and the Other, Master and Slave, were not there to stay and had nothing metaphysical or essential about them, but had to be read and understood in historical terms ... Thus the categories which are today called so solemnly categories of Difference ... were for Marx ... categories of social conflicts – which throughout the class struggle were supposed to destroy each other. (Wittig 1992: 52f)

Failure to question the categories “man” and “woman” impedes the fight for their disappearance. The aim of feminism is to abolish the class “men,” thus simultaneously abolishing the class “women,” “for there are no slaves without masters” (Wittig 1992: 5). In Wittig’s writings, lesbians, “whether they know it or not,” are beyond the category of sex, just as the proletariat in Marx’s conception is beyond the category of class. Both mean the negation of a negative existence.¹⁵

The rise of evangelical religion, Enlightenment political theory, the development of new sorts of public spaces in the eighteenth century, Lockean ideas of marriage as a contract, the cataclysmic possibilities for social change wrought by the French revolution, post-revolutionary conservatism, post-revolutionary feminism, the factory system with its restructuring of the sexual division of labour, the rise of a free market economy in services or commodities, the birth of classes, singly or in combination – none of these things *caused* the making of a new sexed body. Instead, the remaking of the body is itself intrinsic to each of these developments. (Laqueur 1992: 11)

Authors from different backgrounds and persuasions agree that in the late eighteenth century “human sexual nature changed” (in the words of Virginia Woolf, quoted in Laqueur 1992: 3). It was argued that not only were the sexes different, but they were “different in every conceivable aspect of body and soul.” Sexual

difference was now meant to be a “difference in kind, not degree” (Laqueur 1992: 6).¹⁶ It is in this context that “the discourse on sexual dimorphism begins to shape social theory” (Herdt 1996: 35). Still in the Renaissance context, “no true, deep essential sex ... differentiated cultural man from woman” (Laqueur 1992: 124). The period that developed “claims of the sort that Negroes have stronger, coarser nerves than Europeans because they have smaller brains, and that these facts explain the inferiority of their culture” also came up with the notion that “the uterus naturally disposes woman toward domesticity” (Laqueur 1992: 155).

“Historically, differentiations of gender preceded differentiations of sex” (Laqueur 1992: 62). In pre-eighteenth-century discourses, “the body was far less fixed and far less constrained by categories of biological difference” than thereafter (Laqueur 1992: 106). “In terms of the millennial traditions of western medicine, genitals came to matter as the marks of sexual opposition only last week” (Laqueur 1992: 22). Only the eighteenth century developed the strategy to “escape to a supposed biological substrate” (Laqueur 1992: 8); the teachings of cosmology had no need for biology. The advantage of the older discourse was, though, that it believed that “apart from pleasure nothing of mortal kind comes into existence” (a strange case of wishful thinking). This aphorism (quoted in Laqueur 1992: 3) illustrates the pre-Enlightenment assumption that female orgasm was as necessary for successful conception as the male one. Thanks to this lack of scientific accuracy (subsequently amended by modern medicine), female sexual pleasure still had a place in the logical order of things, although sexuality was (theoretically at least) already subsumed to the notion that its purpose is to produce offspring.¹⁷

The interpretation of human bodies according to precisely two categories – neither more nor less than two – is logically an outcome of reducing the perception of erogenous zones of the body to those that are functional to reproductive activity: the sexual responsiveness of body areas that are irrelevant for reproduction is denied and may become taboo. These “desexualised” areas are thus made irrelevant to the sexual classification of bodies, too. The concept of “the two sexes,” *the one sex* and *the other sex*,

is therefore an effect of heterosexuality as a societal norm. In European societies before the modern era, sexuality seems to have been less clearly dichotomised into hetero- and homosexuality. Everybody was assumed – or rather, suspected – to perform homosexual as well as heterosexual acts, the former being variously persecuted and punished. Since the nineteenth century, however, homosexual acts are automatically considered to be expressive of the homosexual nature of the actor, who is no longer considered to be perpetrating sinful homosexual (or rather, “sodomite”) acts, but who is “a homosexual”, that is, a member of a particular category of human species. The discourse moves from whether, or how, homosexual acts need to be punished to whether the homosexual as such, as a different sort of species, is persecuted, psychiatrised or tolerated.¹⁸ Just as “race” is assumed to determine automatically and spontaneously the racialised individual, “sex” is understood as specific and irreducible urgency. Sex and race are extra-historical essences underlying a species’ essence. Whatever the meaning of sex may once have been, in modern society sex, like race, becomes essence.

As Connell writes, the abolition of “the linking of fields of social practice to the reproductive division” would mean that sexual difference would be simply a complementary function in reproduction, not a cosmic division or a social fate. There would be no reason for this to structure emotional relationships, so the categories heterosexual and homosexual would become insignificant (Connell 1987: 287).

What Ernest Renan claimed for nationality is true also for the imposition of dichotomous sex: it has to appear as a “daily plebiscite,” but simultaneously as something one has always been, something one has actively forgotten to have become and in how cruel a way one has become so (Renan 1990: 19). The violent history of the shaping of the object “no longer appears with that object. Hence, ‘sex’ is the reality-effect of a violent process that is concealed by that very effect” (Butler 1987: 135) – in other words, what Adorno, following Marx, would have called a fetish.

In a society based on separation and isolation of atomised individuals who are unhappily chained together only on the

basis of a set of neurotic projections (nation, religion, etc.), as well as the practices and institutions that undergird them, it seems unsurprising that Tweedledee will occasionally, perhaps increasingly, have sex without the involvement of Tweedledum, or even of another Tweedledee. Although this tendency must be expected within the dialectic of bourgeois society, it makes its defenders and therapists turn to their Adam Smith problem: masturbation threatens the healthy measure of neurosis that we call social cohesion. It has been vilified by bourgeois society as an anti-social form of subject-object identity¹⁹ that counters heterosexuality and bypasses, or makes irrelevant, the holy cow of sexual dimorphism. The power of the taboo on “the solitary vice” can be read from how strongly it features even in the thinking of bourgeois society’s most radical progressives. Richard Carlile, editor of Tom Paine’s works and of the “Red Republican,” unleashed in *Every Woman’s Book or What is Love etc.* (1828) a “sustained attack on conventional sexual morality,” advocating birth control and “Temples of Venus” for the “controlled, healthy, extramarital satisfaction of female desire” (Laqueur 1992: 229). In doing so he was, according to Laqueur, motivated by promoting “the natural and healthy commerce between the sexes,” which also led him to a particularly “shrill” rejection of masturbation. His concern was a moral one: the “solitary vice” is a vice precisely because it is *solitary*.

The debate over masturbation that raged from the eighteenth century on might therefore be understood as part of the more general debate about the unleashing of desire in a commercial economy and about the possibilities of human community in these circumstances. (Laqueur 1992)

Laqueur refers to this as a “sexual version” of the classic Adam Smith problem: without actually challenging the principles of the capitalist mode of production, which manifestly produces egoistic, calculating, monadic individuals: how can I make sure that the degree of community necessary for its functioning reproduces itself spontaneously and continuously (that is, without an overtly Hobbesian, Leviathan-type state)? This question which haunted

Smith has never lost anything of its near-universal grip on liberal thought in the widest sense of the word.

A parallel case is the discourse on prostitution, which, like masturbation, was declared to be a core anti-social evil for the first time in the nineteenth century (Laqueur 1992: 230). The modern obsession with campaigning against prostitution is grounded in seeing it as “a confusion between the dangerously asocial world of commercial exchange and the healthy social world of married love” (Laqueur 1992: 231). Laqueur draws a surprising parallel here between the nineteenth-century discourse on prostitution and the twelfth-century papal campaign against usury (which subsequently re-emerged in the various forms of modern anti-Semitism), an early “response to a nascent market economy.” The church hierarchy, basing itself on Thomist philosophy, denounced the “usurious” charging of interest because “nothing real is gained by it.” In Thomist Catholicism, the usurer’s capital is illegitimate because it is generated in the sphere of circulation only: it does not come from productive (which in this context means first of all agricultural) labour. Laqueur points out that the same pattern of argument is directed in the nineteenth century against prostitution: money earned from prostitution is illegitimate money since “nothing is produced.” Like usury, prostitution is “pure exchange” (Laqueur 1992: 231–2); like homosexuality, it is unproductive and purposeless. The concern with social cohesion and a clean separation of the sphere of exchange from that of love, privacy, etc. collides in the case of prostitution with the tendency of commodity relations to “really subsume” all aspects of life. Bourgeois society cannot consistently maintain that value-production is the only value it respects; it has to try to maintain values (family life, heterosexual love, parental affection, etc.) that are undermined by the production of value. Laqueur does not make any such references here, nor does he develop the theoretical implications of what he is describing, but his attempt to think antisemitism and sexuality together within the framework of a critique of the concept of production resonates with the thrust of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

SUBSTANCE; SUBSUMPTION

Adorno quotes in *Negative Dialectic* a passage from Hegel's *Rechtsphilosophie* in which Hegel gives eloquent expression to one of the fundamental paradoxes at the core of the concept of the modern state:

It is downright essential that, although the constitution originated in time, it not be viewed as a product; for it is that, rather, which is flatly in and for itself, and is therefore to be considered divine and enduring and above the sphere of that which is produced. (quoted in Adorno 1990: 356; 1966: 349f)²⁰

Adorno points out that what Hegel is describing here is affirmatively what Marx later would describe critically as fetishism. Hegel's observation that the state (represented here, *pars pro toto*, by its constitution) must appear as if it was not the artefact that everybody knows it to be, reappears in many disguises in many different, but related discourses: it is behind Renan's famous assertion that "one has to have forgotten" the many cruelties that were necessary for the nation, the great peacemaker that is so central to bourgeois political thought, to be built; or else, in Simone de Beauvoir's assertion that "being" a woman means "becoming" what one (supposedly) has been all along. When Hegel pointed to the daily reading of a particular newspaper as one of the reiterative acts that produce what looks like it has always been there,²¹ the same can be said of Renan's "daily plebiscites" and Butler's daily acts of "performative reiteration" that produce the (real) illusion of sex. Marx's concept of "fetishism" is the tool to unpack all of the above.

It should be pointed out, however, that race and sex implications do not wilfully need to be inferred in the concept; they have been present there all along. The German philologist F. Max Mueller complained in a lecture of 1878 that "the very theory" of fetishism was at the time so widely debated in a whole range of discourses that it had itself become "a kind of scientific fetish" (Pettinger 1993: 90). Marx reflected the fetishism of fetishism in his own adoption of the concept. The word itself – related and similar in

meaning to “artefact,” something that has been made, a product – had in the Middle Ages referred to popular talismans, which were heretical and illegal devices. The early Portuguese explorers and colonialists employed the term to describe “the charms worn by peoples encountered on the West African coast” (Pettinger 1993: 87), identifying the undesirable habits of savages at home and in the colonies by referring to them with the same word. In a text from 1704, a Dutch West Indies official, Willem Bosman, reported that colonial subjects had massacred hogs after a hog had eaten a snake, which happened to be the chief fetish of the respective region (Pettinger 1993: 88). This enlightened gentleman disapproved strongly of such uneconomic behaviour by which “the real, commercial, value of things is obscured by a sentimental respect of certain animals.” By the middle of the nineteenth century, “fetishism” had become increasingly racialised and denoted, in the words of the anthropologist Edward B. Tyler, “the one-sided logic of the barbarian” (Pettinger 1993: 84). But it did not escape bourgeois scholarship that there was fetishism at home, too. Tyler himself pointed to collecting “scarce postage stamps or queer walking sticks” as the Englishman’s own fetish. The point is, however, that European fetishes were thought of as eccentricities or anachronistic superstitions, whereas the mind of the savage was *constituted* by fetishism. In 1888 the French psychologist Alfred Binet introduced the concept of fetishism into the discourse on sexuality. Binet referred to “degenerates who experienced intense genital excitation from the contemplation of certain objects which would leave any normal person completely unaffected” (Pettinger 1993: 85).²² Thus throughout its evolution, from the heretic via the savage to the sexual pervert, the concept of fetishism serves bourgeois society (whether emerging or established) to denote what it thinks it most definitely is not. The rhetorical power of Marx’s adoption of the term lies in its ironic inversion: in Marx, fetishism is not the exception or the anachronism, but the truth and the essence of modern bourgeois society. (The half-developed form of Marx’s concept, clearly revealing its origins, is evident in an article from October 1842 in which Marx ridicules a debate in the Rhenish Diet on a law concerning the theft of wood, conducted blatantly in

the interest of the aristocratic owners of the forests. Marx argues that the social and legal rights of human beings are sacrificed to the “wooden idols” [Marx 1975: 226]. In his conclusions, he turns the concept of the fetish against the provincial assembly, explicitly drawing on the colonial implications of the concept:

The *savages of Cuba* held gold to be the *fetish of the Spaniards*. They held a celebration in its honours and then dumped it into the sea. Had the savages of Cuba attended the meeting of the Rhenish provincial estates, would they not have held the wood to be the fetish of the Rhinelanders? But they would have gathered from the following meeting that the Rhinelandish fetishism is to the service of animals, and the savages of Cuba would have dumped the rabbits into the sea in order to save the humans. [Marx 1975: 147]²³

One commodity can stand in for other commodities only because it is a product of labour. The equivalent form represents the abstract labour that has “gone into it.” The product of concrete labour is thereby reduced to being the form of appearance of a quantity of abstract labour, which assumes a somewhat higher form of realness: the abstraction becomes the essence, or the soul, of the concrete, from which it has been abstracted in the first place. It is on the basis of this “essentialism,” as it were (not Marx’s term), that “despite its buttoned-up appearance, the linen recognises in [the coat] a splendid, kindred soul, the soul of value” (Marx 1990: 143).

Marx draws another parallel: a king is a king only “because other men stand in a relation of subjects to him. They, on the other hand, imagine that they are subjects because he is king” (Marx 1990: 149). “King” is a social relation (actors say: “the king is always played by the others”). “King” is not the “being” (essence) of the person who is king, but it is the set of effects that constitute the relations between the king and the subjects. The normal behaviour of loyal subjects is that they reify, or essentialise, the kingness of the king and behave as if the king’s kingness was the cause of their subjectness. Fetishism means (among other things) that a relational category is transfigured into an essential category: something that “really” consists in relations between people is presented as, and to some extent “really” becomes, an “essential,” intrinsic and spontaneous

characteristic of a thing, which in turn becomes the mere carrier of that essence.

At the very moment in history when the execution of the French king opened the door to a “society of equals,” human groups came to be seen as formed by an irreversible “*diktat* of nature,” which made “groups into fetishes, frozen into some intrinsic form of being” which was said to possess immutable, homogeneous qualities (Guillaumin 1995: 56, 63). The traditional idea of “the one great society of Man, ... subject to and contrasted with God” was replaced by the scientific conceptions of many different groups “scattered through time and space.” Modern society created the individual as freed from estate and hierarchy (as well as from the means of subsistence) and placed him and her into the chains of somato-genetic determinism (Guillaumin 1995: 72). This argument, developed by Colette Guillaumin with both race and sex in mind, can help to ground historically the more generic critique of “essentialism” and “identity.” Contemporary concepts of sexual, cultural, racial, ethnic, national or whatever such identity bear their eighteenth-century mark in assuming that social groups have an intrinsic essence and relate to other such groups only secondarily and accidentally, like Leibnizian monads: the ensemble of social relations is external to the essence of the group. History is outside essence, essence outside history. Whereas “black” skin colour had initially merely been the (arbitrary) sign of a particular social position (slavery), it was subsequently reinterpreted as the cause of that social relation (Guillaumin 1995: 142): initially, people in the areas where slaves could be made comfortably and with a healthy profit just happened to be black, later it appeared that they were slaves *because* they were black (at which point their black skin stood in for their racial essence which also coloured their souls). In what Guillaumin calls “endogenous determinism,” the mark is more than just an (arbitrary) mark: it is an expression of the nature of the object. A particular nature is “directly productive of a social practice” and of social relations. Essence produces appearance without mediation and outside inflection; it is spontaneous nature. A social group is imagined to possess an invariant *substance* that is handed

down through the generations. This essentialism, or “endodeterminism,” is not an accidental case of “false consciousness.” The point is that the individual is *really* made into a mere example of a category, a “class,” imagined as a substantial entity possessing an essence that seems to determine spontaneously, from its own, the individual’s inherent finality. The essence of the “class” is also the essence or identity of all that fall into it (although at the same time it never is).

The members of a modern race are an undifferentiated mass, an agglomeration of contemporaries juxtaposed in space, or, as journalists and politicians hunting immigrants love to put it, drops in an enormous tidal wave. All drops in a tidal wave are identical, and in their reducibility to a common abstract essence (water; race) they resemble the mass accumulation of commodities that constitutes capital. The monadic members of a race share their racial essence just like the modern masses of commodities share the quality of being carriers of value (the soul of the coat, in Marx’s image). Furthermore, the racialised individual is characterised by the same precarious dialectic between identity (racial essence: obnoxious) and difference (individual appearance: sometimes acceptable or at least useful). This is what makes racism modern, a product typical of democratic and individualist society.²⁴ Guillaumin argues that “woman” refers to just such a “class” or category. Monique Wittig writes in the same spirit that while the declaration of colour has come to be considered discriminatory, the declaration of sex still goes unchallenged: one has widely stopped calling certain people “Negroes” but one continues calling certain people “Women” (Wittig 1992: 199f). Likewise, Connell writes:

While homosexual behaviour of some kind may be universal, this does not automatically entail the existence of self-identified or publicly labelled “homosexuals”. ... “the homosexual” represents the modern definition of a new type of adult male. (Connell 1987: 147f)

This argument reflects Foucault’s observation that, whereas “sodomy” had been a category of forbidden acts perpetrated by any human being as a sin that would or would not lead that

person to the stake, the modern homosexual is a species that needs special treatment, involving experts ranging from social workers and psychiatrists to the concentration camp warden (Foucault 1979: 43).²⁵ The homosexual act counts not as an occasional sin but as expressive of the compulsive nature, the identity of the actor. The replacement of essence for sin may lead to more lenient or harsher treatment. Foucault and Mieli make virtually the same case that sex is an effect of social relations and practices, which come to be treated as an essence, a natural, trans-historical drive or urge. The fetishistic concept of sexuality lies at the pivot of the transformation of the family and the modern, normalising state and its racist practices. Within one and the same process, the automatic monster's (i.e. capital's) subsumption of the entire human life process normalises sexuality into sexual identities, "samenesses," a fetishistic process of negation and reduction.²⁶ The division of the social world into apparently autonomous spheres seems particularly crucial to this process: "the division of the public and domestic spheres," itself "a product of the expansion of marketised social relations and the liberal state," has "superimposed these increasingly polarized functions on traditional notions of gender relations" (Paige 2000: 15).²⁷

The critique of essence-as-identity, and its underlying link to the historic process of "real subsumption," fundamental to otherwise rather different intellectual traditions, lies at the bottom also of Horkheimer's early critique of "sociology of knowledge" (as in Mannheim) which was a defining element in his formulation of the framework of critical theory:

Marx correctly sought to do away with the conviction that there is some essence of being which pervades all epochs and societies and lends them their meaning. It was precisely this element of Hegelian philosophy that appeared to him to be an idealist delusion. Only human beings themselves – not the "essence" of humanity, but the real human beings in a definite historical moment, dependent upon each other and upon outer and inner nature – are the acting and suffering subjects of history. (Horkheimer 1993: 138f; 1981: 22)

But “the irrational ends of bourgeois society could hardly have been stabilized by other than effective irrational means” (Adorno 1990: 333).

MEN; THINGS

Sexuality, reduced to a crystallized social and intellectual essence, achieves the final spoliation of everyday life and that is its contribution to terrorism. (Lefèbvre 1971: 172)

“If men no longer had to equate themselves with things, they would need neither a thing-like superstructure nor an invariant picture of themselves, after the model of things” (Adorno 1990: 95; 1966: 103). The “reduction of human labour to the abstract universal concept of average working hours” is “fundamentally akin to the principle of identification” (Adorno 1990: 146; 1966: 149): it makes “nonidentical individuals and performances become commensurable and identical.” Just as “the concrete types of human labour are dissolved into abstract human labour as the creator of value,” so also all “concrete peculiarities which distinguish one representative of the *genus homo sapiens* from another dissolve into the abstraction of man in general, man as a legal subject” (Pashukanis 1989: 113). In compensation for having become “slavishly dependent,” the subject acquires under modern conditions a “rare gift,” in Pashukanis’s words: “a will, juridically constituted, which makes him absolutely free and equal to other owners of commodities like himself.” Poor bourgeois subject: you think it unfair that not all individuals own equal numbers of slaves, factories, wives, acres, i-pods etc.? Don’t despair; there is consolation: “everyone possesses *his own* body as the free tool of his will,” as Fichte, expanding on Locke’s conception of property, pointed out (Pashukanis 1989: 114). Fichte’s notion that I own my own body as a tool also resonates with Descartes’ concept of the thinking subject as radically separate from “his” (or her) body, and the fact that the owner of the tool can change this tool, make it fit better any given purpose or order, brings us back to de Beauvoir’s central problem of the “becoming” of the subject, the

problem of the human potential to transcend and reinvent – or rearticulate – the body, and the debate around Wittig, Butler and others that sprung from it.

Pashukanis describes a specific “legal fetishism” that complements commodity fetishism. He writes that “the social relations of production ...[on the one hand] appear as relations between things ... and on the other, as relations between the wills of autonomous entities equal to each other – of legal subjects” (1989: 117). While this is merely a restatement of the classic problem of free will and determination – in sociological language, agency and structure – Pashukanis points to the specifically capitalist form of what he calls the legal subject: legal subjectivity in the modern, bourgeois sense of the word is abstracted from every concrete claim, whereas in the feudal context, every right was a privilege.

Only in commodity production ... does the general capacity to possess a right become distinguished from concrete legal claims. Only the continual reshuffling of values in the market creates the idea of a fixed bearer of such rights. (Pashukanis 1989: 118)

The abstraction from concrete claims is possible only through the everyday experience that the commodity-owner “changes roles instantaneously from claimant to debtor.” The seller of a commodity, even if it is “only” labour-power, will be the buyer of another commodity in the next instant. The worker who spent the day in the factory may command the services of another wage-worker in the evening. This modern fluidity in the concrete makes possible and engenders the idea of the abstract, fixed, unalienable subject “as the bearer of every imaginable legal claim” (Pashukanis 1989: 118). It is *because* relationships are fluid that they are frozen solid, and only because of their frozenness (their “buttoned-up appearance”) that they can make a claim to equality (their “universal soul”):

The idea of the worth and in principle equal worth of the personality has a long history. It made the transition from Stoic philosophy to being employed by Roman jurists, went from there to the dogma of the Christian

church, and thence to the doctrine of natural law. ... But regardless of the various forms this idea may have assumed, it expresses nothing but the fact that, as soon as the products of labour are exchanged as commodities, the different concrete types of socially useful labour are deduced to labour in the abstract. In all other relations, people's dissimilarity (sexual or class-determined) is so conspicuously apparent in the course of history that one is amazed ... by the fact that, before Marx, no one had looked into the historical causes which produced this bias of natural law. For if, over the centuries, human thinking has returned with such persistence to the proposition that people are equal, and has elaborated this proposition in a thousand variations, then there must have been some objective reality behind it. (Pashukanis 1989: 152–3)

This reality is the exchange of commodities, for millennia an affair that barely affected most people but that in the modern period has come to constitute all of human society. But “Man is not only what he was and is, but equally what he can come to be” (Adorno 1990: 51; 1966: 61):

We cannot say what man is. Man today ... drags along with him as his social heritage the mutilations inflicted upon him over thousands of years. To decipher the human essence by the way it is now would sabotage its possibility. (Adorno 1990: 124; 1966: 130)

The reasonable form of society in which “men” no longer have “to equate themselves with things” will bring about that other modernity in which identity will be freed from the ice of identification: The remnants of a division of labour which the radical curtailment of working hours might leave in society would lose the horror of shaping the individuals throughout (Adorno 1990: 278f; 1966: 275).

In “The Essay as Form,” Adorno referred to “the leisure of the child-like person” [*die Muße des Kindlichen*] as a defining feature of the essay, probably Adorno's most characteristic form of writing (Adorno 1991: 4; 1963: 11). Life in a reasonable society will be more like an essay than a treatise and will accommodate plenty of childlike leisure. However, as always, and an extra bit more clear-sighted than fellow theorists like Marcuse or Benjamin,

Adorno stops short of endorsing even the idea of “the leisure of the child-like person”: in the crucial section 150 of *Minima Moralia*, Adorno warns that the advocacy of a readmission of the partial drives, an element of becoming childlike, is a crucial part of modernity *as it is*, and while the pluralism of the partial drives (as represented in Baudelaire’s writings which for Adorno illustrate this issue) clearly has his sympathies, he warns that their embrace must not mean regression. The “idea of modernity,” according to Baudelaire, contains the false promise that the self-destruction of “the monism of bourgeois reason” was modernity’s hope. It produces, though, merely pluralism as a “many-coloured *fata morgana*,” responding to the partial drives of the child. Likewise, the cult of “sensation,” of immediate perception of the allegedly new (including the “craving for headlines” and other addictions), is merely a helpless response to the fact that capitalist modernity means monotony, identity and neurotic, compulsive repetition more than anything else. It effects the “decomposition of the subject” and “drains all firmness from characters.” Ego-weakness, faithlessness and “pathic subservience to situations,” though, will not beat the system (Adorno 1974, s.150).

Two complementary and indirectly related explanations for the emergence of the modern concept of sexual binarism are evident: one, more “macro” as it were, sees it as an effect, reflection or expression of the public/private divide, that is, the carving up of the social world into supposedly, but never actually, independent spheres, the other, more “micro,” as an effect, reflection or expression of the imposition of near-exclusive genital sexuality, which in turn is part of the larger disciplining effort that created the modern subject. The domestication of the partial drives in the form of genital organisation of sexuality, capital’s precarious insurance policy against its subjects’ regression into childlike leisure, created the modern form of the idea that there are exactly two sexes, men and women, and that “being” one or the other organises and shapes every aspect of any individual human being. The trajectory to a reasonable form of society (or rather, a state of things after and beyond the fetishes of society, state and individual) would have to include the critique of the genital organisation of

sexuality. The importance of homosexuality in this context is that it tends to be less strictly genitally organised for the obvious reason that it is not subordinated to what counts for society as the functional purpose of sexuality, procreation, although it can still, of course, be equally subordinated to social reproduction in a wider sense (i.e. beyond the reproduction of working bodies: hence legal-ideological phenomena such as gay marriage, etc.).

All aspects of modern bourgeois subjectivity are intrinsic aspects of one ensemble of social relations, the capitalist mode of production that can only be overcome *as* an ensemble. The society of identity has a belly (as it is still the old monster the Leviathan, in different clothes), and can always find reasons why some particular element of non-identity needs to be devoured. To the same extent to which the normal, banal, cool racism that is implicit in the nation-form does every now and again turn hot, the heterosexual world of two sexes may occasionally indulge in some gay-bashing, however respectable homosexuality-as-an-identity may have become. Because the non-identical is never completely accommodated in any identity, neither the homosexual nor the heterosexual is completely safe from rushes of gayness, the dissolution of “sexuality,” just like no “historical compromise” and social-democratic national regime can ever completely eradicate rushes of proletarian-ness, the dissolution of class. All aspects of the capitalist regime remain precarious. The good news is that there is room for anti-politics, everywhere, always.

NOTES

1. “In marriage, Christianity transfigured the hierarchy of the sexes, the yoke that the male organization of property had put on the female character, as a union of hearts, thus assuaging the reminiscence of sexuality’s better pre-patriarchal past” (Adorno and Horkheimer 1971: 96; 1997: 107; 2002: 83–4). Marriage was thus the legal expression of a kind of historical compromise between the sexes which has now become dispensable to some extent.
2. English (and hyphenation) in the original text
3. The actual quote reads: “to be a well-favoured man is the gift of fortune; but reading and writing comes by nature” (from *Much Ado*

About Nothing, III. 3; the line is delivered by Constable Dogberry, one of Shakespeare's great clown characters). The German translation quoted by Marx reads: "Ein gut aussehender Mann zu sein ist eine Gabe der Umstände, aber lesen und schreiben zu können kommt von Natur" (Marx 1993: 98); "favour" is used to mean "appearance" on several occasions in Shakespeare.

4. Mario Mieli lived as a student in London in 1970–1. He was an activist in the British Gay Liberation Front before he moved back to Italy and helped found the radical gay organisation *FUORI!* In 1977, his book *Homosexuality and Liberation* was published in Italian in Turin, and in 1980, in English in London. "Gay Communism," the concluding chapter, was also circulated as a separate booklet (nd, presumably from the late 1980s).
5. An interesting and in many ways powerful dialectic which is central to the topic of this book can be gleaned from the controversial background of this publication. This text was published in a journal of a section of the French *ultra-gauche*, which only a short time later embraced the Holocaust *négationnisme* of Faurisson. A useful discussion of this notorious *affaire* can be found in *La Banquise*, no. 2, 1983 ("le roman de nos origines," www.geocities.com/~johngray/roman17.htm). More recently, *Théorie Communiste*, no. 13 (www.theoriecommuniste.org/TC133.html) made an important contribution to an explanation of the catastrophic drift of a part of the French "ultra-left" into "Holocaust denial" and to defending petty reactionaries: the naïve notion (crucial to modern antisemitism) that an essentially human community is "vampirised" by capitalism into the "false community" of democratic (liberal, atomistic) society and that fighting democracy and liberal society, by any means and in whichever coalition is deemed necessary, should be a communist priority. It is evident that any ideology or movement that claims to liberate the true human community from being "vampirised" can be linked to this idea. (I am grateful for these references to Niels Turnbull.) The case of the French "ultra-left's" tipping over into reaction shows that the decisive difference between critical theory and French "ultra-leftism" is that the former is immunised against naïve, undialectical critiques of liberal democracy by a comprehensive theorisation of antisemitism.
6. Adorno is certainly not pretending to write from anything but a male, heterosexual perspective here; that is, his own.
7. The most programmatic statements on the question of "woman" in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* can be found in the last third of the "Juliette" chapter (Adorno and Horkheimer 1971: 96–107, 1997: 106–19, 2002: 83–93). Adorno and Horkheimer seem to refer

to women primarily “as the representatives of the possibility of exclusion understood as an *escape* from the all-inclusive system of power,” their “potential exemption from the totality” (Hewitt 1992: 147). Although the condensed form of their argument relies on making “woman” a *chiffre*, again, despite itself, the notion that the marginalisation of women contains the potential of specific experience and insight, even a utopian element not accessible to those who are fully included/subjected/subjects, is the same that became crucial to modern feminism after de Beauvoir.

8. *Minima Moralia* also includes a number of comments on homosexuality that have been criticised as homophobic by Halle (1995) and Hewitt (1996). (I am grateful to Pr. S. for pointing me to this issue.) The rejection of a conception of socialism as rooted in the virility and fecundity of the proletariat is central to critical theory, which means that if elements of such “traditional,” uncritical socialism can be found in critical theory, they must be interpreted and challenged as contrary to its main thrust. Halle and Hewitt make a strong case that Fromm’s revision of Freudian theory, and the ways it was adapted by other members of the Institute for Social Research, was homophobic (namely in the conflation of narcissism and homosexuality, either of which are subsequently seen as conditions of Fascism); Adorno’s formulation that “totalitarianism and homosexuality belong together” (1974, s. 24), which comes just before the sequence quoted above, indeed seems to reflect the Stalinist canard that Nazis are gay. The latter is of course itself a reflection of the right-wing idea that homosexuals are part of a conspiracy against the family and Western civilisation as well as the socialist tradition of rejecting “unproductive sexuality” (along with anything else that seems “unproductive”) (see Hekma, Oosterhuis and Steakley 1995a; Oosterhuis 1995; Herzer 1995). The concept of the “failure” in Freud’s notion that homosexuality is based in a “failure to adapt” to the heterosexual, oedipal norm should though, from the perspective of a negative dialectics, be read as an opportunity for emancipation, although, like all other aspects of the disintegration of the bourgeois subject, it can also lead to the opposite of emancipation, that is, to Fascism. It seems that Adorno did not recognise this particular dialectic although Hewitt (1996: 77–8) himself hints at the possibility to read narcissism through negative dialectics.
9. Krahl was one of Adorno’s students and highly regarded by him (Claussen 2003: 397). Krahl died in an accident in January 1970, six months after Adorno.
10. Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) translate this as “denatures.”

11. Unlike Connell, Mieli occasionally uses an ambivalent rhetoric that implies an underlying, original, trans-historical nature to which we might have recourse via “liberation”: for example, in his suggestion to “give life back its human form and essence” (Mieli 1980: 116), or “to (re-)conquer our mysterious underlying being” (Mieli 1980: 119). His *explicit* position is, however, critical: “The struggle to liberate desire, the ‘underneath,’ is a struggle for the (re-)conquest of life”, but this “is not a question of redeeming the noble savage (equally a bourgeois myth), but of releasing our aesthetic and communist potential, our desire for community and for pleasure that has grown latently over the millennia” (Mieli 1980: 169).
12. It is noteworthy that the editor of the English translation added (in 1980) that the gay movement failed to maintain and develop more radical politics such as those expressed by Mieli because it stuck to the concept of a biological sex underlying gender as the latter’s “material base,” failing to go beyond the (feminist) discussions of the time (Mieli 1980: 12). This is a strong hint that debates in the gay movement had already provided the critique of the sex/gender distinction (e.g. Butler 1990) in the late 1970s, a lead that it would be worthwhile exploring. The following formulation by the early Baudrillard (1981: 99) is also noteworthy: “No being is assigned by nature to a sex. Sexual ambivalence ... must be reduced, for as such it escapes genital organisation and the social order. ... [T]his irreducible reality [must be dispersed] into sexes that are full, distinct and opposed to one another. This structure leans on the alibi of biological organs ... [and] it is pegged to the grandiose cultural models whose function it is to separate the sexes in order to establish the absolute privilege of one over the other.”
13. Consider also the following: “Given our original and underlying trans-sexuality, and recognising the polymorphous and ‘perverse’ disposition of the child to an eroticism that makes no exclusive distinction as to the sex of the object of its libidinal impulse, it is clear that each one of us has a hidden erotic attraction towards the sex that is not (or is scarcely) the focus of our conscious desire” (Mieli 1980: 122).
14. This aspect of Mieli’s argument is paralleled by Foucault in the first volume of *History of Sexuality*, which was published roughly at the same time (Foucault 1979).
15. Wittig (more than Mieli) seems to presuppose an essential, ahistoric, non-gendered transsexual human being, which is dichotomised, subjected, sexed only in second place, by society. Butler uses Foucault’s critique of 1970s Reichians to make the point that there is no human essence prior to history and society. The most

important point of critique she levels at Wittig would not apply to Mieli to the same extent: “Wittig’s radical disjunction between straight and gay replicates the kind of disjunctive binarism that she herself characterizes as the divisive philosophical gesture of the straight mind. ... The ideal of a coherent heterosexuality that Wittig describes as the norm and standard of the heterosexual contract is an impossible ideal, a ‘fetish,’ as she herself points out” (Butler 1990: 122). The dialectic inherent in Wittig’s as well as Mieli’s positions (the real-abstract character of fetishised social relations) seems not to be on Butler’s radar most of the time.

16. It was not, for example, until 1759 that anyone bothered to reproduce a detailed female skeleton in an anatomy book to illustrate its difference from the male (Laqueur 1992: 10). Until then anatomy books showed one basic structure for the human body – the “male.”
17. Laqueur observed that “the erasure of female pleasure from medical accounts of conception took place roughly at the same time as the female body came to be understood no longer as a lesser version of the male’s (a one-sex model) but as its incommensurable opposite (a two-sex model). ... Organs that had been seen as interior versions of what the male had outside – the vagina as penis, the uterus as scrotum – were by the eighteenth century construed as of an entirely different nature” (Laqueur 1992: viii).
18. This sums up some of Foucault’s argument in the first volume of *History of Sexuality*.
19. A society based on a chain of ceaseless acts of “equivalent”-exchange of non-identical objects can allow subject–object–identity only as a philosophical idea, where it serves as a red herring, confusing those who look for a way out of the exchange totality. In reality there is no such identity.
20. This quote from Hegel is from the end of the section “Weltgeist und Naturgeschichte.”
21. Hegel observed that “newspapers serve modern man [*sic*] as a substitute for morning prayers” (Anderson 1991: 35).
22. The term seems to play only a minor role in Freudian psychoanalysis. Freud discusses fetishism in chapter 2 of the first of the *Three Essays on Theory of Sexuality*, “Sexual Aberrations.” Later, fetishism plays a role in the context of the theory of the fear of castration, laid out e.g. in chapter 8 of *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*. Further, there is an essay titled “Fetishism” from 1927.
23. The article as a whole is directed against the particularism not of bourgeois society, but of the provincial aristocracy who subvert and boycott the establishment of general, non-particular, rational law

- and the modern (capitalist) nation-state. Marx attacks in this early text the Rhinelandish backwater (his home) for standing in the way of (bourgeois, Prussian) progress.
24. This case has been similarly argued by Etienne Balibar in several of his contributions.
 25. That “homosexuality as we know it is a relatively modern institutional complex” was suggested as early as 1968 by Mary McIntosh, then, apparently simultaneously, by Michel Foucault and Jeffrey Weeks in 1977 (Gayle Rubin 1984: 276).
 26. Mieli was influenced by Amadeo Bordiga and Jacques Camatte. Mieli took from Camatte’s *Il Capitale totale* (1976) the Marxian concept of “real subsumption,” an historical process where capital not only subsumes labour in the narrow sense of the word – those activities which are waged labour in capitalism – but also subsumes “the entire human life process” (Mieli 1980: 115). The concept of “real subsumption” is developed in a section of *Capital*, vol. I (“Results of the Immediate Process of Production”), which Marx did not include in the published text; it is published in Marx (1990) as an appendix, where “real subsumption” is defined on pp. 1034–8. In the published text of *Capital*, “real subsumption” is mentioned only once (Marx 1990: 645). Mieli also cites the *Grundrisse* (Marx 1973: 705f), where the concept refers to the processes by which capital subsumes Man’s “general productive power ... the development of the social individual.” “Real subsumption” leads to new and *specifically* capitalist forms and relations of production, and as such to the capitalist mode of production *sui generis* (Marx 1990: 1035). Capital assumes (apparently) a productive power of its own, which actually is the developed *social* productive power of labour.
 27. “Rationality, instrumentality and impersonality” have only in the modern context become “masculine” qualities (Paige 2000: 14). Anthony Fletcher quotes an English publication from 1770 which states that a “new kind of animal, neither male nor female, a thing of neuter gender, lately started up among us ... it talks without meaning, it smiles without pleasantry, it eats without appetite, it rides without exercise, it wenches without passion” (Fletcher 1995: 320, quoted in Paige 2000: 14).

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