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Werner Bonefeld

University of York, UK

Abstract

Adorno's social theory dissolves the dogmatic posture of reified things. Its critical intention is to decipher the human social practice hidden in things. For Adorno, the social practice that counts is the one that fights barbarism, and for this fight to succeed, it has to tackle the social preconditions that make barbarism possible. A social practice that fails to do just that partakes in the false world of bourgeois society that it ostensibly seeks to overcome. In this context, Adorno argues, on the one hand, that the fight against barbarism is impossible because every social practice is the same. On the other, he says that negation is the only alternative to the falsehood of bourgeois society. The essay explores Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* to examine this paradox and to decipher its conception of social practice in a reified world. What does it mean to say 'no'?

Keywords

conceptuality, conformist rebellion, fetishism, freedom, negation, negative dialectics, social practice

Prologue

Financial socialism averted financial collapse in 2008, for now at least. It socializes financial losses, guarantees 'toxic debt' and secures private gains, and, in order to balance the books, attacks conditions. The premise of financial socialism is the ongoing accumulation of 'human machines' on the pyramids of accumulation. It requires organized coercive force to sustain the socialization of bad debt and the privatization of gain. However, although a state of emergency is the state of exception, it is necessary to understand that for the oppressed 'the "state of emergency" ... is not the exception but the rule' (Benjamin, 1965: 84). The state of emergency belongs to the conceptuality of capitalistically constituted social relations – government on the basis of the rule of law presupposes the force of law-making violence. The rule of law presupposes social order. Law

Corresponding author:

Werner Bonefeld, Department of Politics, Derwent College, York YO10 5DD, UK.

Email: werner.bonefeld@york.ac.uk

does not apply to social disorder. Disorder has to be transformed into order by the force of law. Violence holds sway in the reality (*Sache*) of the state (see Bonefeld, 2006). Financial socialism illustrates well Marx's notion of the state as the executive committee of the bourgeois. And the conceptuality of bourgeois society? This, too, is well brought out in the *Communist Manifesto*:

... society suddenly finds itself put back into a state of momentary barbarism; it appears as if famine, a universal war of devastation, had cut off the supply of every means of subsistence; industry and commerce seem to be destroyed; and why? Because there is too much civilization, too much means of subsistence; too much industry, too much commerce. The productive forces at the disposal of society no longer tend to further the development of the conditions of bourgeois property; on the contrary, they have become too powerful for these conditions, by which they are fettered, and so soon as they overcome these fetters, they bring disorder into the whole of bourgeois society, endanger the existence of bourgeois property. The conditions of bourgeois society are too narrow to comprise the wealth created by them. And how does bourgeois society get over these crises? On the one hand by enforced destruction of a mass of productive forces; on the other, by the conquest of new markets, and by the more thorough exploitation of the old ones.

(Marx and Engels, 1996: 18–19)

How, then, might it be possible to organize social relations that satisfy human wants, that recognize the equality of individual human needs, and that therefore allow humanity to exist in dignity as a purpose, rather than a resource? In a word, how can one achieve human emancipation, restoring 'the human world and ... human relationships to *man* [*Mensch*] *himself*' (Marx, 1964b: 370, emphasis in original)?

I

In the context of war and terror, global economic crisis, dispossession, unemployment, and abject misery, discussion of Adorno's conception of praxis might appear quaint. Here we have modern forms of barbarism and there we have the theoretician who denounced '1968' as a 'pseudo-movement'. Nevertheless, Adorno's negative dialectics is important. It challenges us to think what it means to say 'no'.

To say no to something is simple. But to say what the no is difficult. First of all, the no is not external to but operates within that same society which it opposes. Like Marx's summons of class struggle as the motor of history, the no drives the negative world forward. It is its dynamic force (see Heinrich, 1982). Furthermore, to say what the no is compromises the no insofar as it becomes positive in its affirmative yes to something that has no valid content except the false totality of bourgeois society itself. The no is immanent in the false society; it belongs to it and gives it its dynamic.

What sort of praxis is needed to fight barbarism? Can this fight be reduced to This course of action against That outrage, or vice versa? And who negates the social preconditions that constitute the possibility of This and That? Can barbarism be fought, as the journal *International Socialism* says that it can, in alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood, who, repeating the paradigmatic Fascist gesture, demand a 'capitalism without capitalism'?¹ Only

a reified consciousness can declare that the enemy of my enemy is my friend. Originally the critique of ideology sought to reveal the necessary perversion of human social practice in its appearance – as agent of the relations between things. Enlightenment was its critical intent. Critical thought is therefore not an ‘expression’ of social forces whose ‘real’ interests it pretends to represent in theoretical terms. Instead, it aims at these forces themselves, seeking their dissolution.

Adorno argued that the ‘metamorphosis of labour-power into a commodity has replaced the living by the dead’ (1974: 229). He thus suggested that every social activity is always already what Marx had called the activity of personifications of economic categories. That is, the ‘individual subjects’ exist as mere ‘charactermasks’ (Adorno, 1973: 305) and ‘agents of value’ (1973: 311). They thus exist for themselves as ‘mere partners in social wealth and social struggle’ (1973: 304), each under ‘the compulsion of the universal’ (1973: 311), which ‘degrades the individuals to its function’ (1973: 199). For Adorno, the universal is the ‘law of value, which capitalism realizes over the heads of men’ (1973: 199). There could therefore be no such thing as emancipatory praxis because the reified world of bourgeois society would only allow reified activity: that is, ‘the class relationship makes up the objective motor of the production process which the life of all men hangs by, and the primacy of which has its vanishing point in the death of all’ (1973: 320). In distinction to traditional Marxist theory, class is not a positive category. It is a critical concept of the false society. Although there was thus ‘time for a praxis that fights barbarism’, such praxis is impossible since ‘whatever one does, it is false’ (Adorno, 1962: 30). In the end, ‘everything is the same’ (Adorno 1972: 369), but not quite: when the students occupied the Institute of Social Research in 1968, Adorno called in the police to have them removed by force.

In my view, Johannes Agnoli’s take on Adorno’s action is apposite. As he put it: ‘... the Adorno who called in the police was already his successor’ (Agnoli, 1969: 202). Agnoli likens his negative dialectics to the workings of a mole that burrows away underground and whose efforts thus prepare the insurrection at a time of its enforced retreat (see also Krahl, 1971). Negative dialectics, says Adorno, ‘flouts tradition’ (1973: xix). It frees dialectics from ‘affirmative traits’, and refuses ‘to lend itself to sanctioning things as they are. To negate a negation does not bring about its reversal’, and were any such reversal to occur, it would merely prove ‘that the negation was not negative enough’ (1973: 159–160). Especially in miserable times, it makes sense to look at Adorno’s negative dialectics to see the mole at work, to appreciate its philosophical destruction and subversive cunning, and to ask about the conceptuality of human social practice in a reified world.²

II

The focus of Adorno’s *Negative Dialectics* is on capitalist society as the unity of subject and object. His dialectics of subject and object says that ‘society as subject and society as object are the same and yet not the same (1993a: 44). The human subject, Man, does not exist for and by itself. Conception of society as a mere subject purges the subject of its social substance. The subject does not objectify itself as subject. It objectifies itself in the object. That is, ‘it is objectivity which constitutes the subjective mode of conduct’ (1972: 570).

Man is a social being and there with a being *qua* objectification (*Vergegenständlichung*). Man is always objectified Man. The issue that the fetishism of commodities brings to the fore is not objectification but its alienated or reified mode – the subject's objectification exists in an inverted form, in which the thing subjectifies itself in the person, and the person objectifies him- or herself in the thing. For Adorno, 'objectivity' is 'the generic term for all relations, institutions, and forces in which humans act' (1972: 199). Society comprises an 'objective conceptuality' (Adorno, 1971: 209) that focuses the social laws of reproduction which comprise the subject's objective existence. These laws appear natural because of their 'inevitable character' under the 'prevailing conditions of production' (Adorno, 1973: 354). Their nature is, however, entirely social. That is, capitalist society as an object comprises 'something which is already reified', and its reification is socially constituted; it is specific to its mode of objectification.

Society, says Adorno, is 'objective' insofar as and 'because' its 'own subjectivity is not transparent' (1993a: 43). Society is subjective 'in that it refers back to human beings who form it' (1993a: 43). Objectivity 'realizes itself only through individuals'. Everything is 'mediated by consciousness' (1993b: 126). Society as mere object comprises the socially necessary delusion that social structures and social laws produce and reproduce themselves. 'The thesis that society is subject to natural laws is ideology' (Adorno, 1973: 355). It conceives of the laws and 'objective mechanisms of [capitalist] society' (Adorno, 1972: 239) as if posited by nature. Social objectivity does not posit itself – it is 'the posited universal of the social individuals that constitute it' (1993b: 127). What this means is well brought out by Marx when he writes of the money fetish that 'a social relation, a definite relation between individuals ... appears as a metal, a stone, as a purely physical external thing which can be found, as such, in nature, and which is indistinguishable in form from its natural existence' (1973: 239). Social objectivity 'does not lead a life of its own' (Adorno, 1993b: 127). It is a socially constituted objectivity – social relations vanish in their appearance as a metal or a stone, and this appearance is real. 'Concepts', Adorno says, 'are moments of the reality that requires their formation' (1973: 11). There is only one world, and that is the world of appearance. What appears in the appearance of society as a 'stone', or a 'coin', is, however, a definite social relationship between individuals subsisting as relationship between 'coins'. The purpose, then, of negative dialectics is 'to open up the non-conceptual with the aid of the concept, without reducing it to the concept' (Adorno, 2008: 65). Society appears as some transcendental thing that governs by means of the 'invisible hand', which takes 'care of both the beggar and the king' (Adorno, 1973: 251). Its transcendent character is real – as the inverted subject *qua* objectification. That is to say, 'all concepts refer to non-conceptualities' (Adorno, 1973: 11).

In his *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno argues that, at best, historical materialism is the critique of things understood as dogmatic (1973: 196). In distinction to traditional conceptions of historical materialism, which purport a materialism to history with the result that history becomes a 'basic ontological structure of things in being' (1973: 358), Adorno conceives of historical materialism as a 'critical theory' (1973: 197) that 'aims at the thing itself' (1973: 205) from within its 'own context' (1973: 197). Capitalism, he argues, is not some historically specific application of some abstractly conceived trans-historical economic nature. Rather, capitalist social relations have a specific conceptuality, and this

conceptuality holds sway in reality (*Sache*) itself. Adorno thus holds that the categories of bourgeois political economy are finite, transient products of the finite and transient reality of capitalism.³ Adorno's negative dialectics is such historical materialism. It does not think about society. It thinks out of society. That is, it seeks to decipher the conceptuality of things in human social practice, however perverted this practice might be in the form of the object. Adorno's negative dialectic is immanent in its context – it is not applied to society from the outside. That is to say, theory does not possess scientific photographs or images of the empirical world. The understanding of capitalist society as a historically specific anatomy of a trans-historically conceived economic nature constructs historical development as a 'scientific doctrine of invariants' (1973: 355).⁴ Such 'transcendent argumentation disposes of things on the basis of its claim to power' (1973: 206). That is, its critique of capitalist society does not aim at the thing itself. It criticizes the capitalist organization of economic nature, and claims socialism as the superior social organization of this same economic nature. The target of the criticism remains therefore 'undisturbed as it is, and not being hit at all, it can be resurrected at will in changed constellations of power' (1973: 206) – from the capitalist implementation of Taylorism to the Soviet implementation of Taylorism, from the capitalist republic of labour to the socialist republic of labour. Negative dialectics is not a dialectics of the way in which the enduring structures and mechanisms of natural necessity manifest themselves in different modes of production. It is a dialectics of society as the unity of subject and object. 'Its objective goal is to break out of the context from within' (1973: 407).

In the critical tradition, conceptualization therefore does not mean the expounding of meta-theories, which, by means of infinite regress, finishes up akin to the doctrine of the invisible hand with deist conceptions of social existence, whether in their religious or secularized forms – the so-called 'logic' of trans-historically conceived economic matter (see Gunn, 1989). Instead, its critical intention is to reveal the social foundation of invisible principles, and to show their genesis in human social practice. It argues that human social relations produce their own enslavement to the invisible, whether in its religious or secularized forms. Conceptuality does also not entail the explanation of one thing by reference to another. Such thought moves from one thing to another in an attempt to render its term coherent by means of external reference. The state is explained by reference to the economic, and the economic by reference to the state. Similarly, demand is explained by supply, and supply by demand. By means of vicious circularity, then, explanation becomes tautological. Further, conceptuality does not mean the discovery of natural laws, like, for example, the so-called 'natural' tendency of Man to barter, as Adam Smith alleged. That Man has to eat says nothing about his or her mode of subsistence and the social necessities that a mode of subsistence entails – the so-called 'social laws'. Society, not nature, is the point of critical departure. Economic categories have neither trans-historical validity, nor a God-like infinity, nor do they posit themselves, as if by nature. They belong to the society from which they spring.

Adorno's critical theory recognizes 'the existent' (Adorno, 1941: 318) for what it is: '... the human being itself in its social relations' (Marx, 1973: 712). That these social relations are reified, appearing as a stone or golden metal, does not make them less 'human', as if the reified world were a world apart. Reification is not something objectively 'given'. It is not posited by nature. It is a social product. As Marx put it, value is a

relationship ‘between persons expressed as relations between things’ (1983: 80 fn. 1). In contrast, then, to traditional historical materialist accounts that trace social phenomena back to some basis in nature, Adorno’s negative dialectics seeks to decipher the social constitution of things and, as such, it is intransigent towards both their apparent ‘nature’ and their ‘naturalization’.

This *reductio ad hominem* that for Adorno (1973: 186, 387; 1993b: 143) characterizes the intent of critical theory does not entail the replacement of the object by the subject. There is only one social world. That is, the distinction between objectivity and subjectivity presupposes objectivity as the mode of existence of the subject. Detached from objectivity, subjectivity amounts to a mere fiction. The meaning of objectivity excludes the possibility that it can also be a subject. However, to be an object is part of the meaning of subjectivity. Subjectivity means objectification, however perverted this objectification may be in its appearance. Appearance (*Schein*) ‘is the enchantment of the subject in its own world’ (Adorno, 1969: 159). The circumstance that objectification (*Gegenständlichkeit*) exists as alienation or reification does thus not imply that there is an as yet undiscovered, and indeed undiscoverable, logic that lies solely within the thing itself. Only as a socially determinate object can the object be an object (see Adorno, 1969: 157). Reason exists – but in irrational form. The irrational world is a rational world. What, then, is the concept of reality? As Debord puts it: ‘... in a world which really is topsy-turvy, the true is a moment of the false’ (1987: para. 9). Truth appears thus to exist in the mode of being denied – an existing untruth. Yet, it is true all the same.

III

‘All social life is essentially practical.’ This, from Marx’s 8th *Feuerbach* thesis, includes thinking. Thinking is part of social life and all social life is essentially practical. The thesis continues: ‘All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational explanation in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice.’ The thesis is clear and at the same time most difficult. Thought is able to reveal reality *qua* demystification, and demystification depends on the comprehension of human practice. The difficult aspect is this: for thought to be thought, it needs to comprehend human practice. Its comprehension demystifies. What sort of human practice has Marx in mind? Where might it be found? The appearance of human practice as personification of economic categories or bearer of structural properties does not show the human practice whose comprehension alone is said to explain the world of things. If it were, there would be no need for demystification as essence and appearance would coincide. Marx’s thesis suggests that human practice needs to be discovered by thought in order to comprehend the mysticism of its own appearance in forms that deny it. In short, the comprehension of human practice demystifies, but human practice is not immediately given in its appearance.

Hegel’s notion that essence has to appear does not mean that the human subject makes an appearance by asserting itself against the world of things – say, in terms of a conception of class struggle as a force that, from the outside, breaks into the capital relation during periods of crisis (see Bonefeld, 1995). Hegel’s notion that essence has to appear means that essence cannot choose not to appear. It is forced to appear in its own inhospitable world. That which makes essence essential subsists in appearance. Its appearance

is thus at the same time its disappearance. It is forced to appear, and the necessity of its appearance entails that it vanishes. Essence vanishes in its appearance. The law of essence is its disappearance *qua* appearance. That is to say, in the 'enchanted and perverted' world of capital (Marx, 1966: 830), essence appears 'as a thing' (Marx, 1973: 157). Adorno captures this appearance *qua* disappearance when he argues that essence (*Wesen*) is first of all the fatal mischief (*Unwesen*) of a world that degrades men to means of real abstractions that rule over them (see Adorno, 1973: 167). Essence has a certain conceptuality. That is, 'no matter how much blame may be attached to the subject's contribution, the conceived world is not its own but a world hostile to the subject' (Adorno, 1973: 167). Nevertheless, this hostile world is valid only as a human world. That is, the circumstance that essence disappears in its appearance is as real as the fact that, conversely, there would be 'nothing without individuals and their spontaneities' (Adorno, 1973: 304). Reification therefore 'finds its limitation in reified Man' (Adorno, 1975: 25). The reality in which the social individual moves day in and day out has no invariant character: that is, something which exists independently from Man. In its entirety, it is a world of human practice (see Adorno, 1975: 173). For economic categories, the human subject is a mere metaphysical nuisance. Adorno's critique shows that this nuisance is in fact their essence – essence disappears in its appearance and 'is falsified by a résumé of essentials' (1975: 32): the essentials of price, rate of profit and interest rate, labour unit costs, rate of growth, and so on.

Economic rationality is blinded to the point of madness by the sight of whatsoever eludes its rule. That is, 'essence is what must be covered up, according to the mischief-making law of unessentiality; to deny that there is an essence means to side with appearance, with the total ideology which existence has since become' (Adorno, 1975: 169). Its ideology comprises what 'liberalism used to think' society was about: that is, a 'resourceful functional context' (Adorno, 1975: 65) in which the social forces, vendor and buyer of labour power alike, 'mere partners in social wealth and social struggle', act rationally as executors of economic laws over which they have no control. Adorno's essence is not some abstractly conceived idea of Man as species being that, however alienated from its own self in the world of things, remains true to itself as a 'subject in resistance' (see Holloway, 2005). Adorno's essence is 'society as the unity of object and subject', however much the subject is degraded to a functional means of the object that it forms. Thus, the demand that thought is adequate to its subject matter entails more than it bargains for. Its adequacy cannot be established by means of falsification or verification. There is no verifiable 'it is'. To say that something 'is' already casts doubt on the proclaimed identification of the 'it'. To bring things to their concept requires that concepts are open to the experience of the thing. The economic category of wage labour belies its experience. Just as the freedom of the wage contract challenges the experience of the concept of freedom in the hidden abode of production, so does the notion that 'poverty is not unfreedom' (Joseph and Sumption, 1979). Dialectics opens concepts.

Dialectics is not a formal procedure or method applied to reality. The traditional call 'for unity of theory and practice has irresistibly degraded theory to a servant's role' (Adorno, 1973: 143). The claim that a social theory requires 'validation by means of empirical corroboration' (Callinicos, 2005: 58) debases the critical purpose of thought. It leaves things untouched inasmuch as it thinks about things on the basis of things, and in

the manner prescribed by them. Instead of asking what the things are, it asks how best to view and arrange them. Its protest against reification is reified. According to some ordering criteria, practice can be classified as left or right indifferent to ends and social contents that hold sway in things.⁵ If, however, a practice is indifferent to social contents, then it is bereft of meaning. That does not mean that it is meaningless; far from it: it seeks power, and is the prey of power (see Adorno, 1973: 143). It views the social subject as either an agent of social transformation or an adaptable economic resource, or both, as in the case of dialectical materialism (compare Adorno, 1973: 355). The much-quoted unity of theory and practice does not entail a ‘concession to weakness of thought’ (Adorno, 1973: 206). On the contrary, practice is ‘an eminently theoretical concept’ (Adorno, 1973: 44). Negative dialectics does *not* think *about* things. It thinks ‘*out of*’ things (Adorno, 1973: 33, emphasis in original). There is no second reality beyond the world of appearances. It does not deceive itself by pretending that appearance is distinct from essence as if reality comprises the interplay between, on the one hand, structural laws of development and, on the other, the social action of human agents, the so-called ‘social forces’. The so-called ‘dialectics of structure and agency’ gives dialectics a bad name. Whether conceived in terms of a life-world and a system world, or in terms of structure and agency, negative dialectics refuses to be drawn into the vicious circularity of definitional thought that seeks to render terms coherent by external reference to one another. Such thought conceives of society under the ‘spell of identification’ (Adorno, 1973: 172).

Adorno’s negative dialectics holds that however much the objective world has autonomized itself from the acting individuals, it remains a form of human practice. Human practice does appear in its appearance. It appears, returning to my earlier illustration, as ‘a metal, a stone, as a purely physical external thing’ (Marx, 1973: 239). Adorno’s concept of society says the social relations between individuals appear as what they really are – material relations between persons and social relations between things. The social individual objectifies him- or herself in things and the things subjectify themselves in the acting individuals. Society is thus a ‘sensuous supersensible thing’.⁶ As Reichelt put it: ‘... human sensuous practice subsists through its supersensible existence in the autonomization of society as both the object and subject of its perverted social practice’ (2005: 65). That is, the traditional ‘separation between in-itself and for-itself, the substance of the subject, is abstract mysticism’ (Marx, 1964a: 265). The irrational world is rational. In Adorno’s words:

... the supersensible world [the world as governed by things], which is the inverted world, has thus transcended the other world [sensuous human practice] and contains it within itself; for itself as an inverted world, that is, inverted in and of itself; it is itself and its opposite in *their* unity.

(Adorno, 1971: 131, emphasis in original)

In terms of his *Negative Dialectics*, identity is identity of identity and non-identity. Subject and object are thus inverted in a topsy-turvy way (see Backhaus, 2005). Social reality is one of disunion, contradiction, fissures, and antagonism. Negative dialectics, if its attempt to think out of things should succeed, thinks the disunited unity of things, moves within the reality’s contradictory constitution, and deciphers the reality of things

as a reality of human practice in the form of things. Disunity in the form of unity entails coercion as the condition of unity – a coerced and coercive unity that appears in the form of general commensurability, where difference appears as equivalence in the exchange of equal values, which in the form of profit seem to possess the occult quality of being unequal to themselves. Difference is coerced to appear indifferent to itself in the form of value – ‘the actual mask of death’ (Adorno, 1975: 60). The rationally acting subjects who exchange on the market to secure their being execute abstract social laws which they themselves have generated historically and reproduce through their rational behaviour, and over which they have no control – their rational practice exists through them and in them, and also against them (Bonefeld, 2002).

Dialectics says ‘no more, to begin with, than that objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder’ (Adorno, 1973: 5). Its critical intent is to reveal the social constitution of things. This entails the opening of the non-conceptual within the concept. For example, the conceptuality of the wage-labourer as a personification of variable capital entails what it denies. It denies sensuous practice, and this practice is immanent in the concept wage-labour. Sensuous practice exists within the concept of variable capital in the mode of being denied – sensuous practice cannot be reduced to the concept of variable capital – it subsists within its concept but cannot be reduced to it. Further, for variable capital to function, it requires the ingenuity and spontaneity of human purposeful practice. Yet, this too is denied in its concept. That which is denied in the concept has no separate existence from the concept. It lives within and through the concept. Since the non-conceptual within the concept cannot be reduced to the concept, ‘conceptual totality is a mere appearance’ (Adorno, 1973: 5). Moreover, ‘contradiction is non-identity under the aspect of identity’ (1973: 5). Negative dialectics does not pacify the contradiction, be it by means of reconciliation, integration, incorporation, or simply formalistic indifference to social contents. It thinks ‘in contradictions, for the sake of the contradiction once experienced in the thing, and against that contradiction’ (1973: 145). Contradiction ‘indicates the untruth of identity, the fact that the concept does not exhaust the thing conceived’ (1973: 5). Only an ‘indefatigably reified consciousness’, one enthralled by the theological quirks of the object, can claim that it possesses theoretical photographs of the real world. Its contribution to social theory is entirely positive. It conceives of social laws as laws of nature, and of myth as historical logic. In distinction, thought that does not go into its object does not recognize its object. In order to understand things, one has to be within them.

Conclusion

Adorno’s negative dialectics detests reconciliation with negative conditions. The idea that the negation of the negation is positive makes no sense. This idea ‘can only be upheld by one who presupposes positivity’ (Adorno, 1973: 160). Refusal to sanction things as they are entails irreconcilability: the negation of the negation does not negate what it has negated. It negates the negative human condition. In short, ‘what is negative is negative until it has passed’ (Adorno, 1973: 160). What is false is false. ‘The whole is false’ (Adorno, 1974: 50) – the whole has to go. If, however, the whole is false, then whatever one does is false. Irreconcilability of negative dialectics with negative conditions appears thus to render impotent its practical dimension.

Nevertheless, as I have argued, Adorno's concept of the concept is entirely practical. His negative dialectics does not succumb to the notion that human action unfolds within the framework of objective and in any case naturalized social structures and laws. Instead, it reveals structures as the constituted forms of bourgeois social praxis. His conception of 'praxis' is distinct. According to Lukács, the worker can resist reification because, as long as he rebels against it consciously, 'his humanity and his soul are not changed into commodities' (1970: 172). That the soul of the worker-in-resistance is the party is of no interest here. What is important, however, is that reification does not affect the soul and humanity of the worker, as if they are not of this world but of divine issue. Bloch (2000) conceived of the unreified within reification as the 'inner transcendence of matter'; and Negt and Kluge (1993) conceived of it as 'materialist instinct', and Hardt and Negri (2004) speak about bio-power, which describes some sort of biologically conceived potential that, despite capitalism's best efforts at real subsumption, remains trans-historically active as the basis of communist resistance. And Adorno? He would have none of this. The very idea that there is a world out there that has not yet been colonized by the logic of things is nonsensical. Instead of a concept of society, these differentiations of society into system and soul/transcendent matter/materialist instinct/bio-power separate what belongs together. Indeed, whichever formulation is favoured, they all insist on a subject that is conceived in contradistinction to society. The insisted on subject is not a social subject; it is an asserted subject. It is meant to do what the antagonistic society is no longer assumed to be able to do: that is, realize the social subject in battle against its own perverted mode of existence.

Adorno's negative dialectics has to be studied, especially in miserable times. Its courageous critique of bourgeois social praxis operates like the proverbial mole, which, according to Marx, prepares for the revolution by tunnelling through the defences. The mole is philosophical. Once its work is done, the mole departs. Its departure demands that Adorno's confrontation of the concept of reality with its experience be brought down to 'the real life-activity' (see Marx, 1978: 154) of the unhappy consciousness in everyday struggle over the production, appropriation, and distribution of surplus value in every individual workplace and every local community. Man's existence as an economic category does not entail reduction of consciousness to economic consciousness as such. It entails the concept of economy as an experienced concept, and economic consciousness as an experienced consciousness. At the very least, economic consciousness is an unhappy consciousness. It is this consciousness that demands resolution: '... freedom turns concrete in the changing forms of repression as resistance to repression. There has been as much free will as there were men with the will to be free' (Adorno, 1973: 265).

The article started by asking what it means to say 'no' and how it might be possible to organize social relations that allow humanity to exist as a purpose in dignity. Adorno's negative dialectics does not harbour any illusions about the character of bourgeois society. It is a society that is hostile to the individual, in which time really is money and in which therefore 'Man really is nothing, he is, at the most, time's carcass' (Marx, 1976: 127). Adorno's critical theory argues that the pleasant norms of bourgeois freedom are adequate to their bourgeois content. That is, 'posited positively, as given or as unavoidable amidst given things, freedom turns directly into unfreedom' (Adorno, 1973: 232). Adorno argues that the adherents of dialectical materialism

... failed to notice that the 'ideas' themselves in their abstract form, are not merely images of the truth that will later materialize but that they are ailing themselves, afflicted with the same injustice under which they are conceived and bound up with the world against which [the left critics set them].

(1941: 318–319)

Furthermore, his critical theory rejects as total ideology the idea of resistance for the sake of resistance. It demands recognition of social contents. The fashionable anti-imperialist idea that the enemy of my enemy is my friend is irrational. At best, solidarity with false friends self-affirms a posture of radicalism in conformist rebellion; at worst, maddened by resentment, it calls for action akin to blinded men who, robbed of their subjectivity, are set loose as subjects, with deadly consequences.

What, then, does it mean to say 'no'. Where is the positive? The society of the free and equal can be defined in negation only. Humanization of social relations is the purpose and end of human emancipation. It points the anti-capitalist 'no' in the right direction. However, the effort of humanizing inhuman conditions is confronted by the paradox that it presupposes as eternal those same inhuman conditions that provoke the effort of humanization in the first place. Inhuman conditions are not just an impediment to humanization, but a premise of its concept. This is why 'in the misery of our time, we find [the positive] only in negation' (Agnoli, 2003: 33). For negative dialectics, 'this is its form of hope' (Adorno, 1973: 406). That is to say, Adorno's (1974: 39) statement that one cannot live rightfully in the false totality of bourgeois society is only partly correct – a rightful life begins in the struggle against its false totality. Whatever future there might be, it is always a future present.

Notes

My departmental REF (Research Excellence Framework) advisory board tells me that this paper does not meet the expected standard of excellence. I am most grateful to the three anonymous reviewers who apart from providing helpful comments and suggestions, recommended publication, and to the editors for their decision to publish.

1. 'We say we have to work with the Muslim Brotherhood over specific issues [Palestine or Iraq]' (*JS*, 2005: 31).
2. On this, see the contributions to Holloway et al. (2009).
3. See Callinicos (2006) for a recent enunciation of the orthodox conception of historical materialism as a dialectics between the trans-historically conceived, or in any case naturally determined, forces of production and the historically specific social relations of production. In contrast, Marx held that the forces of production and social relations of production are 'two different sides of the development of the social individual' (1973: 706). On this in relation to orthodox accounts, see Bonefeld (2009), Gunn (1992), and Tomba (2009). Adorno calls the orthodox conception of history a 'perverter of Marxian motives' and criticises it as 'metaphysics' (1973: 355, 358–360). It denies, he argues, the 'spontaneity of the subject, a *movens* of the objective dialectics of the forces and relations of production' (1973: 205, adapted from the German original: Adorno, 1966: 205). The English version translates 'relations of production' as 'conditions', which obscures his critique of historical materialism, understood dogmatically.
4. According to Althusser (1969: 7), *Capital* does not analyse capitalism as a living process. It rather 'develops the conceptual system' of scientific Marxism, which reveals trans-historical

- laws of economic necessity in the anatomy of capitalist society. The critique of political economy is thus seen as a critique of the irrational character of the bourgeois manifestation of trans-historical economic matter.
5. A recent statement by Judith Butler is a case in point. When asked by *Online Magazin für Frauen* to clarify her statement that Hamas and Hezbollah are progressive social movements (<http://radicalarchives.org/2010/03/28/jbutler-on-hamas-hezbollah-israel-lobby/>), she remarks that 'groups like Hamas and Hezbollah should be described as left movements. ...They are "left" in the sense that they oppose colonialism and imperialism' (quoted in <http://www.aviva-berlin.de/aviva/Found.php?id=1427323>, accessed 20 July 2010). Since she does not condone the use of violence, she rejects their tactics, but accepts them nevertheless as members of the global left because they are oppositional. Her definition of the 'left' is indifferent to social ends and contents, and includes bedfellows of the most unsavoury kind. Callinicos (2003: 107) argues that anti-capitalism has to 'meet the requirements of (at least) justice, efficiency, democracy, and sustainability', and, in order to radicalize the anti-capitalist movement towards that end, demands that moral support is given to anti-imperial 'resistance' groups, including the 'respectable Islamic clergy' of the Muslim Brotherhood (Callinicos and Nineham, 2007; also Harman, 2006). The critique of ideology has itself become ideology, in that it supports resistance for the sake of resistance whatever its social content.
 6. This characterization is taken from the German edition of *Capital* (Marx, 1962: 85, 86). The English version translates it first as 'transcendent' and then as 'perceptible and imperceptible' (Marx, 1983: 76, 77). On this, see Reichelt (2005).

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Author biography

Werner Bonefeld is Professor in Politics at the University of York. Before coming to York, he taught at the Universities of Edinburgh and Frankfurt. His most recent publica-
tions include *Kapital & Kritik*, which he co-edited with Michael Heinrich (VSA, 2011),
and *State, Capital, and Class: On Negation and Subversive Reason*, which appeared in
Korean (Galmuri, 2011). He recently completed an ESRC-funded research project on the
German ordoliberal tradition (2010–2011).