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Adorno's Concept of Utopia

vorgelegt von
Safoura Erfanmanesh
Breuerstr. 6
51103 Köln

Matrikelnummer: 2852986
Studiengang: Philosophie

Erstgutachter: Herr. Dr. Jens Rometsch
Zweitgutachter: Herr. Prof. Dr. Hans Rainer Sepp

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Adorno's Concept of Utopia

Safoura Erfanmanesh

**First Advisor: Dr. Jens Rometsch
Second Advisor: Prof. Dr. Hans Rainer Sepp**

**University of Bonn
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Abstract

This master's thesis examines Adorno's concept of Utopia. Throughout this work I argue that Adorno is a utopian thinker and his conception of Utopia is a constellation or montage of negative, messianic-materialistic, formal, and individualistic definitions of Utopia. I elucidate my argument by reconstructing Adorno's conceptual constellation of Utopia in different chapters and sections of this work in the form of an interpretive constellation. In the first chapter, I explain how Utopia got lost, by investigating the causes of the failure of Enlightenment's utopian goals such as rationality, freedom, progress, and establishment of the whole society as humanity. This failure necessitates a radical reconsideration of all fundamental principles of thought and society. In chapter two I analyze Adorno's conception of negative Utopia as the determinate negation of Dystopia. His negative dialectics is the recognition of what is non-identical to thought's concepts and categories. The non-identical is the condition of the possibility of Utopia, because it indicates that there is something 'more' than what our conceptual system of knowledge can comprehend, this 'more' is the utopian. I continue this chapter by discussing Adorno's inverse theology as messianic materialism which maintains that there is no transcendent standpoint which is detached from the concrete context of this world, thus redemption is an immanent emergence from the rifts and crevices of the damaged life itself. I argue that in the dystopian context of here and now there are utopian moments of 'the metaphysical experience' in language and art. This is what I consider as Adorno's formal Utopia which I analyze it in the third chapter. In chapter four I explain Adorno's notion of reconciliation, and his articulation of Utopia as the state of reconciliation of object and subject, body and mind, and individual and society. I conclude this work with a discussion about Adorno's notion of happiness and his definition of Utopia as the state of eternal peace. My final argument is that all definitions of Utopia in Adorno's thought make a constellation for illuminating the idea of the eternal peace, i.e., the state of real happiness for all individuals in a society which is established as humanity.

Keywords: Adorno, Utopia, Negativity, Form, Suffering, Redemption, Reconciliation, Happiness, Humanity

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Introduction

*“The only philosophy which can be responsibly practised in face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption ... beside the demand thus placed on thought, the question of the reality or unreality of redemption itself hardly matters.”
(Minima Moralia §153)*

This Master's thesis sets itself the task of constructing Adorno's conception of Utopia from the scattered and fragmentary references throughout his philosophical works. My main question which I try to answer throughout this work is whether Adorno – despite all his negativity – can be considered as a utopian thinker and what his conception of Utopia could be. My method of enquiry and writing style of this thesis is what Adorno describes it as the utopian form of expression, namely 'the constellation'. I try to approach the concept of Utopia in Adorno's thought from different perspectives and gather his different articulations and definitions of Utopia in a constellation of different sections and chapters of this work, without imposing a certain logical system of arguments upon it.

In the first chapter, I analyze how Adorno considers the Enlightenment as a failed example of the realization of Utopia. I examine Adorno's answers to the questions of why Enlightenment despite all its utopian potentials and promises became a catastrophic regress into barbarism, how Enlightenment's reason lost its revolutionary critical power and turned into the formal-instrumental reason, and in which way Adorno attempts to find an alternative rationality that can avoid the predicaments of 'the identity-thinking' without leaving behind the rationality entirely. I investigate the causes of the failure of Enlightenment's goals – such as rationality, freedom, progress, and establishment of the whole society as humanity – that is the failure of transformation of the existing world into the utopian state of being, and conclude that this failure necessitates a radical reconsideration of all fundamental principles of thought and society.

In the second chapter, I explain Adorno's definition of thought in the age of Dystopia. In the context of here and now that the moment of the realization of philosophy is missed, as Adorno describes,

thought must exist as critique, as the 'ruthless critique' of itself and 'everything existing'. In this regard, this chapter is divided into three sections:

In the first section, I analyze Adorno's notion of 'the non-identical' as the condition of the possibility of Utopia. I explain what Adorno means when he defines his negative dialectics as 'the ontology of the wrong state of things', and his notion of 'Utopia of cognition' which is based on the self-criticism of concepts for the purpose of expressing the non-conceptual. I expand the analysis of concepts to the notion of conceptual reification which suggests that Adorno's negative dialectics is the negation of the reification of concepts. Then I explain Adorno's definition of the emphatic concepts. In Adorno's philosophy, the concept of Utopia, similar to the concepts of freedom, humanity, and rationality, is an emphatic concept which means that it is a concept that gives perspective of something 'more' than what exist. Emphatic concept of Utopia is a concept that has a promise in itself. At the end of this section I discuss the possibility and actuality of Utopia with analyzing Adorno's conception of Utopia as a 'middle possibility'.

The second section of this chapter is concerned with the thought's power of determinate negation which is an important notion for Adorno's utopian negative dialectics. In the time of falsehood, Adorno defines philosophy as the determinate negation of concrete forms of falseness, as the resistance to the hegemonic structure of a coercive society, and as the critique of the ideologies of the status quo. I continue with an interpretation of Adorno's notion of nihilism as the condition for the possibility of Utopia. This section ends with a discussion about utopian longing for a world which is freed from suffering, as a longing which is based upon a concrete materialist urge, not on a universal abstract idea. The physical intolerability of suffering brings about an urge for demanding an alternative to the current state of things.

In the third and last section I discuss the relation of Adorno's philosophy and theology. I try to find answers to these questions that if we consider Adorno as an absolute negativist who believes that no positive utopian thought and action is possible, and at the same time his definition of the utopian longing as an urge for redemption from suffering, then how this redemption can be possible? Can we consider his negative dialectics as a negative theology? Does his urge for the redemption from suffering necessitate to postulate a "wholly other" and a messianic intervention? I explain Adorno's notion of 'inverse theology' and discuss the theological notions of redemption and Bilderverbot which Adorno defines them as secular and immanent. I explain that in Adorno's philosophy – which is not a negative theology, and I interpret it as messianic materialism – body is the locus of hope and promise of the redemption, it is the topos for u-topia. This chapter will be closed with an explanation of Adorno's 'metaphysical experience'. Adorno defines metaphysical experience as the promise of "a transcendence from within", a redemption which emerges from the 'rifts and crevices'

of this damaged earthy life. I analyze how metaphysical experience is the promise of Utopia and the critique of Dystopia at the same time. The object of metaphysical experience is what we can experience by the form of utopian artwork. As I interpret Adorno, by the notion of metaphysical experience he considers a positive content to his conception of Utopia, although I think it is more or less a positive 'form' rather than a 'content'.

In the third chapter, I explain what I consider as Adorno's formal Utopia. In the context of a coercive society which blocks off all possibilities of any utopian content, Adorno considers the genuine forms of expression in language and art as utopian, by considering an emancipatory potential in form which is not conferred from above or outside, but it is form's own self-emancipation. This is what Adorno calls 'the agency of form'. First section of this chapter is concerned with language. I argue that 'constellation', 'essay', and 'parataxis' are the utopian forms of expression and the forms of the expression of Utopia. These forms of expression are heresy to the hierarchical identity-thinking and thus, the proper form for uttering the unutterable, the non-identical utopian. In the second section of this chapter I examine what Adorno considers as the utopian artwork. Utopian artworks are those works of art which function both as the critique and as the ideal. As critique, work of art recognizes and negates the falsehood, and as ideal it indicates the possibilities of a radically different world, namely the Utopia. As I understand Adorno's aesthetic theory, he defines an inverse mimetic and a meontic aspects for the utopian artwork. Artwork's mimesis is not imitating and reflexing the reality as it is, but instead, the utopian artwork functions as an 'inverse mimesis', i.e., in a way that the reality ought to imitate the artwork. The meontic aspect of artwork is its potential for pointing out to another state of things, and depicting what has not been seen or experienced yet. I analyze that the critical power of artwork is in its form alone, and not in any content or meaning. The form of montage which is the negation of false unity and harmony, is the utopian form of the genuine artwork. Artwork's purposelessness is a protest and resistance against the formal-instrumental rationality of capitalism and its culture industry. The utopian work of art by demanding the impossible harmony and unity, and failing to capture it, demonstrates the hope for an emancipated world in which the harmonic reconciliation of parts and whole would be possible.

In the fourth and final chapter I analyze what Adorno means by the notion of reconciliation. I understand Adorno's conception of Utopia as a state of reconciliation of object and subject, body and mind, and individual and society. In this chapter I explain Adorno's concept of 'the addendum' which is an indication to the utopian state of reconciliation of nature and reason. Reconciliation is a

state of neither blind nor repressed nature which Enlightenment failed to gain, and it is in this state that Utopia can be regained. I conclude this chapter with a discussion about Adorno's definition of happiness. I argue why I interpret his conception of happiness as a negative individualistic hedonism, which is the determinate negation of the false forms of happiness in a collective capitalist society. Utopia, as I read Adorno, is the reconciled state of eternal peace and real happiness of all individuals in a society which is established as humanity.

Overall, my argument in this thesis is that I consider Adorno as a utopian thinker, and his conception of Utopia as a constellation or montage of negative, messianic-materialistic, formal, and individualistic definitions of Utopia. I elucidate my argument by reconstructing Adorno's conceptual constellation of Utopia in different chapters and sections of this work in the form of an interpretive constellation.

Chapter One: Utopia Lost¹

In the history of longing for Utopia, in continuation of 'the Golden Age', 'the Republic', 'the Island of Utopia', 'the City of the Sun', 'the New Atlantis', and so on, Enlightenment was considered as the actualization of all those utopian hopes and promises. By definition, Enlightenment was the establishment of the whole society as humanity, the fulfillment of all human potentials and possibilities such as freedom, equality, peace, welfare, and happiness. But why did Enlightenment, – and this is Adorno's question regarding the problem of actualization of Utopia – despite all its utopian potentials become a catastrophic regress into barbarism? How Enlightenment with all the promises of freedom and happiness, with its scientific and technologic liberating forces led to fascism, genocide, and a 'radically evil world'? Why the rational progress toward humanity became a irrational regress into discrimination and inequality? How Utopia got lost? In this chapter – considering Adorno's analyses – I try to find out the answers to these questions.

1. Dystopia of Myth: Eternity of The Actual

“[U]nderstood in the widest sense as the advance of thought”², Enlightenment is the process of intellectual, social, and economical progress toward the establishment of a right society. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer explain how Enlightenment which “aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters”³, became a total disaster. Its failure has the same origin as its triumph, and this origin is the fear of the unknown.⁴

Enlightenment's rationality, aiming to liberate human being from the domination of nature, turned into a rigid ideology and substituted one form of domination with another one. It freed human being from the spell of myth, but became a myth itself. Unsuccessful to emancipate itself from the principle of self-preservation, Enlightenment's reason became a formal and instrumental reason and expanded this principle to all aspects of human being's life. Similar to the mythical worldview that

1 Allusion to Milton's *Paradise Lost*

2 DE 1

3 Ibid

4 See Ibid. 11

justifies the world as it is, Enlightenment's rationality lost its revolutionary critical power and instead, started to justify the status quo as the only world which is possible. This mesmerized rationality denies the possibility of any alternatives that in late capitalism reached to its highest peak, in which for the ones who have authority the principle of "self-preservation means the fascist struggle for power, and for individuals it means adaptation to injustice at any price."⁵

The mythical worldview had the function of giving some kind of meaning to the ancient world, a meaning which helped human beings to know their environment, enabled them to communicate with nature based on their mythical knowledge and to recognize the world as something which is inherently meaningful. Enlightenment's rationality along with disenchantment of the world and undermining the wrong mythical belief system, eliminated meaning entirely, so that "human beings purchase the increase in their power with estrangement from that over which it is exerted."⁶

One aspect of the mythical worldview and its system of meaning which Enlightenment's reason wanted to undermine, was the ancient claim that the world is, and will be, what it has always been; that "there is nothing new under the sun."⁷ But in doing so, Enlightenment itself reverted to myth and took the shape of a rigid fate, due to its instrumental calculating reason that had the claims of knowledge of the whole nature and human beings, which was in fact a limited knowledge that only set "the boundaries to possible experience"⁸. The formal-instrumental reason excludes whatever does not match with, and is not useful for its purposes and subordinate it under being mythical. What itself at the outset was utopian, namely the Enlightenment rationality, once established began to reject every utopian visions as myth and superstitious. Thus for Enlightenment rationality, "despite feeble moralistic attempts to propagate humanity as the most rational means, self-preservation remains unencumbered by a utopia denounced as myth."⁹

5 DE 71

6 Ibid. 6

7 "All things are full of weariness;
a man cannot utter it;
the eye is not satisfied with seeing,
nor the ear filled with hearing.

What has been is what will be,
and what has been done is what will be done,
and there is nothing new under the sun.

Is there a thing of which it is said,
"See, this is new"?
It has been already
in the ages before us." (Ecclesiastes 1:8-10)

8 DE 8

9 DE 71

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer explain the progress of Enlightenment as a process of a disenchantment which led to domination of nature (both the inner nature of human beings and the outer nature including the natural environment and other human beings). Influenced by Max Weber, they define Enlightenment rationality as a kind of rationality which eliminates meaning from natural and social world. In *Economy and Society* Weber describes the purposive or the instrumental rationality (*Zweckrationalität*) as “determined by expectations as to the behavior of objects in the environment and of other human beings; these expectations are used as “conditions” or “means” for the attainment of the actor’s own rationally pursued and calculated ends.”¹⁰ and in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, he describes this instrumental rationality as “simplification and rearrangement”¹¹ of the world. The economical and administered society places the individuals in an “iron cage”¹² from which no escape is possible. This is what Adorno means when he writes that Enlightenment creates a “second mythology”¹³ and a domination by the actual socio-economical blind forces which block off the possibility of the utopian state of things.

2. Reason becomes Unreason: The Self-Destruction of Enlightenment

At the revolutionary stage, Enlightenment's emancipating reason had a utopian dimension by which it liberated the bourgeoisie from the feudal's and the church's hierarchy and totalitarian coercion; but in the process of establishing a new society, this rationality itself became a coercive order:

“The ratio which in accordance with bourgeois class interests had smashed the feudal order and scholastic ontology, the form of the intellectual reflection of that order—this same ratio no sooner faced the ruins, its own handiwork, than it would be struck by fear of chaos . . . This fear shaped the beginnings of a mode of conduct constitutive for bourgeois existence as a whole: of the neutralization, by confirming the existent order, of every emancipatory step.” (ND 21)

Fearful of the chaos after revolution, formal-instrumental rationality categorizes whatever is not familiar to it as chaotic which must be included in its conceptual system. Enlightenment identity-thinking brings every unknown entity under its spell, make every “chaotic, multiple, and disparate” to the “known, single, and identical”, thus nothing new can emerge; and this is precisely the anti-

10 Weber 1978: p. 24

11 Weber 1992: p. 77

12 Ibid 181

13 MM 239

utopian function of the reason which by definition is utopian. Because of the sovereignty of the scientific method in industrial societies, this rationality lost its critical powers and transformed to the formal and instrumental rationality. The progress of natural sciences which led to the dominance of the positivist methodologies, destroyed the emancipatory character of Enlightenment rationality, and this is what Adorno and Horkheimer named “the self-destruction of enlightenment”¹⁴. This self-destruction is the main theme of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the question of “why humanity, instead of entering a truly human state [namely Utopia], is sinking into a new kind of barbarism”¹⁵.

Enlightenment's reason became unreason, and the definition of the Utopia as the community of free individual that coexist with each other turned into the Bacon's definition of utopia, namely utopia as the state of commanding nature in order to “the sovereignty of man” in a sci-tech society. Enlightenment rationality became an instrument for the purpose of dominating nature, and as the result, everything became mechanical, calculable, and under control; “everything – including the individual human being, not to mention the animal – becomes a repeatable, replaceable process, a mere example of the conceptual models of the system.”¹⁶

The emancipatory reason became a reified reason, a reason which lost its function of liberation in order to providing a social context for the well-being of human togetherness. As Adorno puts it, “thought is reified as an autonomous, automatic process, aping the machine it has itself produced, so that it can finally be replaced by the machine.”¹⁷ In this scientific machinery, reason regressed to myth, by presenting what exists as the unchangeable circle of events from which there is no escape. Thus

“the mythical scientific respect of peoples for the given reality, which they themselves constantly create, finally becomes itself a positive fact, a fortress before which even the revolutionary imagination feels shamed as utopianism, and degenerates to a compliant trust in the objective tendency of history.” (DE 33)

3. Dystopia as the State of Unfreedom

Historically, the idea of freedom was one of the most important utopian achievements of the

14 DE xvi

15 Ibid. xiv

16 Ibid. 65

17 Ibid. 19

Enlightenment and Modernity, by appealing to it the bourgeois class disobeyed the feudal and religious order for gaining autonomy and equality. As Adorno explains, “the idea that the human subject should freely give himself a law, that his pure conviction is the law of the world, is a principle that is at the opposite pole to traditionalism of every sort and to any corporatist, feudal or absolutist order.”¹⁸ In the feudal system the political and social authority and power was justified based on the natural (blood) or theological (divinely ordained) grounds, but Enlightenment brought about a free condition in which human beings were not oppressed by any irrational order. For emancipation, “[t]he bourgeoisie in contrast to the feudal class, postulated freedom in a highly external, objective sense. It means freedom from the restrictions and dependencies that the feudal system had imposed to the bourgeois order, the bourgeois class.”¹⁹

But this true freedom as a concrete thing in the context of bourgeoisie’s struggle for emancipating from the feudal state of affair, by and by turned into an immanent quality of human nature. Freedom as a social practice (in contrast to theory) transformed to an abstract notion which was an inherent property of the human beings. But as Adorno emphasizes, freedom and unfreedom only can be experienced in concrete social circumstances, thus the problem of freedom is fundamentally a social, not a metaphysical (i.e. freedom in contrast to determinism in nature, as in Kant's account of freedom) problem:

“The supposedly noumenal subject is transmitted within itself by that from which it is distinguished, by the context of all subjects. The transmission makes it what in its sense of freedom it does not want to be: it becomes heteronomous. Even where unfreedom is positively assumed, the conditions of unfreedom, as those of an immanently conclusive psychological causality, are sought in the isolated individual—which essentially is not so isolated. Not even the individual can find the fact of freedom in himself, and neither can the naïve sense of acting arbitrarily be simply extinguished post festum by the theorem of determination.” (ND 213)

Ignoring the socio-historical context of freedom, the early modern philosophy started to justify freedom as the inherent property of human's nature, and that is the reason “why the idea of freedom lost its power over people”²⁰, because “from the outset it was conceived so abstractly and subjectively that the objective social trends found it easy to bury.”²¹ When human beings are considered as essentially free, nothing in the outside world would be able to threaten their freedom. Therefore this step from political struggle to philosophical justification completely changed the

18 PM 152

19 HF 193-4

20 ND 215

21 ND 215

very concept of freedom. Although rational justification of human kind as a free being started from her actual freedom, but in the next step this concrete freedom turned into an abstract property of her nature. But freedom is always a process, and means liberating *from* a certain concrete thing, but when philosophy started to justify freedom of the mankind, it became a reified concept. As Timo Jütten explains, freedom becomes “abstract, formal and ahistorical; it becomes a metaphysical property of the human being. As a result of this conceptual reification, nothing in the empirical world, be it social and political domination, economic pressure or scientific progress, can touch it.”²² Thus, the rationality that itself was the concrete freedom, became oppression and removed freedom from the empirical world, from where it actually belonged and should have been realized there. Enlightenment rationality replaced one form of domination with other one; i.e. freedom from old world's order of things while introducing new forms of domination of inner and outer nature of human being. Reason became a formula for freedom and oppression²³ at the same time, and this is the contradiction and dialectic of Enlightenment.

Enlightenment itself turned into a rigid system based on the scientific and instrumental rationality that threatens the very freedom which was a utopian achievement of itself. The progress of natural sciences which had discovered more and more about natural determination, left no space for freedom anymore and as a result, the bourgeois class was divided between commitment to freedom in one hand, and its dependency to modern sciences and industrial developments on the other hand;

“[I]n its efforts to subdue nature, the bourgeois class needs the progressive process of rationalization as an instrument. Disenchantment (as Max Weber called it), making the world scientific, the increasing encroachments of science on the world, a process that subjects the phenomena of the world incrementally to the laws of science – all that is a mortal threat to freedom.” (HF 195)

As a result of the scientific and industrial progresses and the emergence of a new form of commercial relations, the formal-instrumental rationality took the place of the critical and emancipatory rationality, thus freedom and Utopia got lost. Adorno argues that always those forms of rationality which allow society to reproduce its norms and values are the dominant forms of rationality, thus in capitalist society this is the formal-instrumental rationality which becomes the dominant form of rationality, a form which deprives human beings from their freedom, externally and internally; externally, the individuals are determined by the demands of a totalitarian and administered society, with all its social, political, and economical institutions. In a capitalist society

22 Jütten 2012: 544

23 See ND 214

individuals are just like the “appendages of machinery”²⁴, and freedom is that form of freedom which social system, in the limited frame of division of labor and social roles for preserving the benefit of the ruling class defines it; the owners of the means of production who falsely declare their interests as identical with the interests of society as a whole, “produce only a caricature of freedom”²⁵. Adorno asserts that although Enlightenment defined freedom as inherent to human nature – which means every one in every situation has the right to be free – but the bourgeoisie is just interested in its own freedom, not in the human kind's freedom in general; therefore “it tended to restrict freedom, especially any demands that threatened to go beyond the bourgeois order.”²⁶ In the early modernity, there was a contradiction between insisting on the human being’s freedom and at the same time refusing this very freedom for the proletariat. In fact bourgeoisie was both interested in and afraid of freedom, since if freedom could have been really actualized, it was the end of that kind of freedom which bourgeoisie posited for itself, i.e. freedom of the trade and competition in a capitalist society:

“The law of value comes into play over the heads of formally free individuals. They are unfree, according to Marx’s insight, as the involuntary executors of that law—the more thoroughly unfree the more rank the growth of the social antagonisms it took to form the very conception of freedom. The process of evolving individual independence is a function of the barter society and terminates in the individual’s abolition by integration. What produced freedom will recoil into unfreedom.” (ND 262)

And internally, the unfree society violates freedom of individuals through the process of socialization and internalization of social norms. In an unfree society, the ego formation (Adorno uses Freudian lexicons) is based on repression, and individuals internalize a false and ideological conception of freedom. As mentioned before, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer, based on a historical anthropology, investigate this corrupted process of human progress towards the utopian state of freedom. They assert that in the process of civilization, the tradition of sacrifice for blind forces of nature for the purpose of preservation and being secure from the wrath of gods, transformed into sacrifice of inner nature of humankind itself, thus “the history of civilization is the history of the introversion of sacrifice- in other words, the history of renunciation . . . This process unfolds within the framework of wrong society.”²⁷ Adorno and Horkheimer by using the Odyssey – “as one of the earliest representative documents of bourgeois

24 MM 147

25 ND 21

26 Ibid. 195

27 DE 43

Western civilization”²⁸, as the prototype for the constitutive subjectivity namely the idealist identity-thinking which understands all experience under the logical order of subjective categories, and leaves no space for the alive unknown particular to express itself – explain the process of repression and renunciation, and conclude that “not merely theoretical but practical tendency toward self-destruction has been inherent in rationality from the first, not only in the present phase when it is emerging nakedly”²⁹. Odysseus, in order to resist against Sirens’ song, ordered his men to bind him to the mast of ship, and plug their own ears with wax, so that they could continue to reach their destination. Adorno and Horkheimer assert that this is exactly the same process of the Western civilization, the process of repression and renunciation for the sake of capitalist benefits.

Adorno, by using the Freudian lexicons, names this repression as “the ego’s rule over the id”³⁰. Civilized individuals should have 'rational' control on their desires and inclinations, but this rational effort is in vain, since the repressed impulses undermine the purity of the rational ego. This repression appears in pathogenese states when “the I has its unfreedom demonstrated to it – by the feeling that ‘this isn’t me at all.’”³¹ The purpose of Enlightenment as the socio-historical progress is liberating human beings from the natural blind forces and those miseries which once upon a time was unavoidable for human life, but by denying human reason as a part of nature, this progress became absurd and functions just as the means of domination of inner and outer nature, in other words, “self-preservation destroys the very thing which is to be preserved.”³²

4. Redemption of the Lost Hopes

In a time that utopian hopes are lost and Enlightenment's promises – i.e. the establishment of a human society in which freedom and happiness can be realized – turned into a catastrophic regress, it is the duty of thought, of philosophy, to provide a shelter for the Utopian. The first necessary step in doing so, is to stop the blind progress towards nothingness which is indeed a regress to barbarism, is to start the “ruthless criticism of everything existing”³³. It should be mentioned that this criticism of modernity and Enlightenment does not imply a regress to the pre-modern stage of human history, but rather the purpose of this ruthless criticism and negation is rescuing and

28 Ibid. xviii

29 Ibid. xix

30 ND 273

31 Ibid. 222

32 DE 43

33 Letters from the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*. Marx to Ruge. Kreuznach, September 1843

redeeming the Enlightenment's utopian hopes and promises. This determinate negation wants to stop “civilization's march into barbarism”³⁴ in order to open up a new sphere for the genuine and emancipatory form of thought and life.

Adorno believes that history is contingent and the process of Enlightenment could have happened differently and the Utopia is not a trans-historical transcendence, or a supra-temporal ideal that can never be realized in the time of human existence; therefore by criticizing what caused the failure of the Enlightenment's utopian plans we can keep our hopes for a better future. Influenced by 'somber bourgeois' writers like De Sade, Nietzsche, and Freud, Adorno rejects the false notion of progress as the obstacle in the way of realization of the utopian state of humanity and asserts that in the evil context of here and now, we should define the true progress as the “resistance to the perpetual danger of relapse”³⁵ and the “prevention and avoidance of total catastrophe”³⁶. Therefore, progress is not a continuity, but in the current situation progress means stopping and contemplating about where exactly the world is going. Adorno rejects the idea of the fullness of life which operates as justification of the all catastrophes of human history due to the blind progress; “the idea of a fullness of life . . . is therefore not the utopianism one mistakes it for. It is not, because that fullness is inseparable from the craving, from what the fin de siècle called “living life to the full,” from a desire in which violence and subjugation are inherent.”³⁷

Adorno's whole philosophy is an attempt for saving Enlightenment's utopian promises through criticizing and negating its falseness. In doing so, he defines a secular notion of redemption which should not “be removed from the concept of progress”³⁸, in a way that philosophy should consider everything from 'the perspective of redemption', redeeming the past hopes and regaining the lost utopia. The Enlightenment's plan of the establishment of the whole society as humanity was miscarried and Utopia got lost, and as a result, philosophy keeps continuing to live in the form of critique and negation, in order to deconstruct this dystopian world and all its ideologies. The melancholic task of philosophy, in a time that no right life is possible, is the rejection of all kind of false particular utopias, namely the metaphysical, religious, technological, or individual definition of it; because utopia is the radical transformation of the whole, “whatever utopia is, whatever can be imagined as utopia, this is the transformation of the totality.”³⁹ In the following chapter, I will

34 Prisms 114

35 CM 160

36 HF 143

37 ND 378

38 CM 148

39 SM 3

analyze this utopian negative task of philosophy in the dystopian time.

Chapter Two: Utopia Negativa

In the introduction of *Negative Dialectics*, under the title of 'The Possibility Of Philosophy', Adorno writes that

“Philosophy, which once seemed outmoded, remains alive because the moment of its realization was missed. The summary judgement that it had merely interpreted the world is itself crippled by resignation before reality, and becomes a defeatism of reason after the transformation of the world failed . . . After philosophy broke with the promise that it would be one with reality or at least struck just before the hour of its production, it has been compelled to ruthlessly criticize itself.” (ND 3)

After the failure of the transformation of the world into a utopian state of things, after experiencing the catastrophic events of history especially in the twentieth century which caused a deep hopelessness and despair for any utopian longing, Adorno asserts that philosophy – in here and now that it has to exist because the moment of its realization is missed – must exist as critique, the critique of itself and whatever exists. The necessity of philosophy today is first and foremost criticizing the thought itself, then the radical criticism of those praxies which instead of arriving in a utopian state led to the hell. After Auschwitz, not only the poet about poetry, but also the philosopher must ask how is philosophy still possible if it does not want to be barbaric?⁴⁰ Adorno answers to this question in his essay “Why still philosophy?” as “if philosophy is still necessary, it is so only in the way it has been from time immemorial: as critique, as resistance to the expanding heteronomy, even if only as thought’s powerless attempt to remain its own master.”⁴¹

I. The Non-Identical as the Condition for the Possibility of Utopia

1. Dialectics as the Ontology of the Wrong State of Things

For Adorno, the true philosophy should be the expression of what he calls 'the unreduced experience through the medium of the conceptual contemplation'. We think by concepts and there is no way around it; but we should be aware that there are things which escape from and does not fit into our conceptual system of knowledge; these are non-identicals which should not be reduced to our subjectively imposed concepts and categories, instead our access to these non-conceptuals

40 See Prisms 34

41 CM 10

which are not identical with our concepts is still possible only through conceptual reflections. Adorno denies any kind of intuition which can give us access to the non-identical; thus he introduces his 'negative dialectics' which is not a method or a standpoint, but rather it is the 'ontology of the wrong state of thing', and 'the constant awareness of the non-identical' as the condition for the possibility of Utopia.

By his negative dialectics, Adorno tries to open up a space for difference, multiplicity, and diversity. Concepts without which nothing is known and are the organon of thinking, "must not be mistaken for what it is in itself."⁴² Referring to Kantian thing-in-itself, Adorno describes Kant's philosophy as utopian, in that the 'Ding an sich' is the non-identical which is the condition for the possibility of Utopia, namely the unknown radically new state of humanity of which in the context of here and now we can not have any positive knowledge. Ding an sich in Kant's philosophy, as well as the concepts of freedom and the intelligible character, are concepts for the things that are to be, not things which already exist.⁴³ But the difference between the Adornian non-identical and the Kantian Ding an sich is that: a) Despite the thing-in-itself, the non-identical is not given, and has a socio-historical mediation, and b) Despite the Kantian Ding an sich which is not knowable for human understanding, the non-identical could be briefly grasped by means of the constellations of concepts.⁴⁴

Adorno develops his notion of the non-identical by criticism of the dominant forms of rationality. As Marx said, "reason has always existed, but not always in a rational form."⁴⁵ In different periods of socio-historical context of human's life, reason took that form which was the prevalent form of rationality in that era. In capitalism, it is the instrumental reason that is the dominant form of thought; thus, in a capitalist exchange society there is no space for the particularities as such and what exists, is just the hegemonic totality that makes no difference between particulars by considering them only by their exchange-values. In this context, concepts are made only for the subjective control and subjugation of nature. But reason can have utopian function, by trying to make space for the existence of the non-identical, by being the solidarity of the whole with all its different particulars. As Adorno explains it by referring to Kantian conception of reason,

"Reason as the transcendental, supraindividual self contains the idea of a free coexistence in which human beings organize themselves to form the universal subject and resolve the

42 ND 11

43 See Ibid. 299

44 See Ibid. 53

45 Letters from the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*. Marx to Ruge. Kreuznach, September 1843

conflict between pure and empirical reason in the conscious solidarity of the whole. The whole represents the idea of true universality, utopia. At the same time, however, reason is the agency of calculating thought, which arranges the world for the purposes of self-preservation and recognizes no function other than that of working on the object as mere sense material in order to make it the material of subjugation.” (DE 65)

Emancipation from the calculating thought's subjugation is the task of the dialectical thought; this means the elimination of the wrong form of rationality by means of the right one, not by appealing to intuition or any anti-rational method. In Adorno's analysis, Kant by considering the thing-in-itself as a gap between 'the claim of knowledge to be the knowledge of the whole reality' and what reality itself is, introduced the 'ideas' of reason which are the negative signs. These ideas are hidden in the gap between what things claim to be and what they are, and points toward utopia; a Utopia that would be above identity and above contradiction; a Utopia which would be the togetherness of diversity⁴⁶.

Thus, the possibility of escaping from the totality lies in the critique of the wrong forms of rationality which are rooted in the wrong concrete situations. Utopia is the redemption from the closed system of ever-sameness, it is the non-identical, something which is not yet; As Adorno writes, “‘A’ is to be what it is not yet. Such hope is contradictorily tied to the breaks in the form of predicative identity.”⁴⁷ Identity-thinking is just a temporary form of thinking which should be substituted by dialectical thinking. This is the antagonism and contradictions of the society that reflects in thought and its concepts, therefore, the negation of the wrong and inadequate identity of concept and thing, is the negation of the wrong concrete socio-historical context as well. Despite the Hegelian dialectics, Adorno's negative dialectic has no claim for truth, but rather it is the critique of that falsehood which prevents Utopia to become actualized. The right state of things, the Utopia, would be free of identity, of contradictions, and this is the end of dialectics itself. In Adorno's words, “the utopia extends to the sworn enemies of its realization. Regarding the concrete utopian possibility, dialectics is the ontology of the wrong state of things. The right state of things would be free of it: neither a system nor a contradiction.”⁴⁸

2. Utopia of Cognition: The Self-Criticism of Concepts

What Adorno calls the “utopia of cognition” refers to the notion of non-identity thinking, i.e. using

46 ND 150

47 Ibid.149-150

48 Ibid. 10-11

concepts against concepts for the fullest experience of objects; breaking through the conceptual system of thought by means of conceptual reflection, because we do not have any immediate and non-conceptual form of experience. This is the utopia of cognition, a mode of cognition that uses concept to “unseal the non-conceptual, without making it their equal.” (ND 10). Non-identity thinking is the self-criticism of concepts, and Adorno's negative dialectics is the consistent negation of the identity of concept and thing:

“The name of dialectics says no more, to begin with, than that objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder, that they come to contradict the traditional norm of adequacy. Contradiction is not what Hegel’s absolute idealism was bound to transfigure it into: it is not of the essence in a Heraclitean sense. It indicates the untruth of identity, the fact that the concept does not exhaust the thing conceived.” (ND 5)

As Gillian Rose puts it, “utopia is another way of naming the thesis that non-dialectical thought is closed thought, because it implies that the object is already captured. To see that the object is not captured is to see utopia.”⁴⁹ Negative dialectics is against the homogeneous totalitarianism of the conceptual systems which leave no space for those things that are not identical with their concepts. Negative dialectics is the openness of thought to the new, to the non-conceptual which doesn't conform with the “pre-established harmony” of conceptual coercive systems of thought. “To think is to identify”, but this act of identification should not be totalitarian; and negative dialectics is the way out of this conceptual “philosophical imperialism”⁵⁰.

Throughout *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno explains why “the matters of true philosophical interest” are “non-conceptuality, individuality, and particularity”⁵¹, so that we can say the principle of non-identity is the foundation of *Negative Dialectics* and Adorno's whole philosophy. 'The non-identical' is the utopian element of which we have no positive knowledge that is gained by our old concepts, but it ontologically exists. 'Non-identity' is a place-holder notion for anything which is 'non-identical' with our familiar and known system of concepts. Through the explanation of the non-identity of subject and object, subject with itself, and object with itself, Adorno opens a space for the new, for something which is not-yet-existing, for utopia.

“What is, is something more”⁵², and negative dialectics attempts to express this 'more' which is

49 Rose 1976: 84

50 ND 191

51 Ibid. 8

52 Ibid. 164

ineffable and unutterable, because it is not identical with our known concepts. The Utopian is exactly this potential of being 'more', which is buried under our hegemonic system of knowledge. Negative dialectics “is the consistent sense of nonidentity”⁵³ and its logic

“[i]s one of disintegration: of a disintegration of the prepared and objectified form of the concepts which the cognitive subject faces, primarily and directly. Their identity with the subject is untruth. With this untruth the subjective pre-formation of the phenomenon moves in front of the non-identical in the phenomenon, in front of the individuum ineffable.” (ND 144)

Adorno asserts that no object is wholly known, and our conceptual knowledge is not supposed to give us the whole reality. He defines the utopian thinking as “the thinking that conceives the difference from what exists”⁵⁴, the thinking that its cornerstone is what is unlike thought, the non-conceptual, or as Adorno names it the “unreconciled matter”⁵⁵ which is constitutive for all concepts. The Non-identical is a substance-concept, it is not the rest of an identical system, but it is something that makes the totality of the identical system impossible, it is the hole in the system which makes it collapse. As Simone Jarvis puts it, despite Hegelian dialectics which is the identity of identity and non-identity, Adorno’s negative dialectics is the non-identity of identity and non-identity.⁵⁶ There is no state of reconciliation as long as there is a totalitarian coercion system in thought, and in society as well. The non-identical will stay divergent and negative as long as there is a strive for homogeneous unificatory system inside (reason) and outside (society) the subject which excludes anything that doesn't conform with it.

It should be considered that although Adorno criticizes self-enclosed conceptual thinking, but he is not a nominalist and does not reject the universals. In this regard he is a Hegelian, asserting that “not only particularity but the particular itself is unthinkable without the moment of the universal which differentiates the particular, puts its imprint on it, and in a sense is needed to make a particular of it.”⁵⁷ He is critical of the totalitarian attitude of conceptual thought, as I analyzed above, so that our conceptual apparatus should not 'determine' the object, our senses, and our experience, but rather should let the non-identical to emerge in the chorismos between concepts and things; but at the same time his negative dialectics is the criticism of the particular as well. His dialectics is a reciprocal criticism that judges “whether the concept does justice to what it covers”

53 ND 5

54 Ibid. 313

55 Ibid. 144

56 Jarvis 1998: 173

57 ND 322

and “whether the particular fulfills its concept”⁵⁸. In the following section I analyze the concept's injustice to the particular, and in the next one I will explain how concepts can be utopian in a way that particulars cannot fulfill them in a dystopian context.

3. Conceptual Reification

Conceptual reification is the process of transforming a concrete and dynamic concept into a rigid and thing-like concept which is abstracted from its socio-historical context.⁵⁹ Adorno asserts that in history of philosophy the process of formulating a concept was always reified, as a result of ignoring this fact that the concept is always mediated by a. the socio-historical context, b. by the other concepts, and c. by the very concept itself. Therefore, the identity thinking, as the dominant form of thinking in the whole history of philosophy – especially in German idealism – is a reified thinking, because its concepts are reified.

Adorno's articulation of reification is a new interpretation comparing to that of Lukács's and Benjamin's.⁶⁰ In *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) Georg Lukács for the first time in the Hegelian-Marxist philosophical tradition, defines reification as “a relation between people [which] takes on the character of a thing”⁶¹ which is a phenomena of the capitalist societies. But Adorno recognizes the reification's root in the process of formation of the modern subject, in which the instrumental reason combines the domination of nature (objects) with the domination of other human beings (subjects). Gillian Rose describes this process as below:

“As Marx said, “It is through its own properties, its own qualities that a thing is use-value ... as values commodities are social magnitudes, that is to say something absolutely different from their properties as things. Where labour is communal, the relations of men do not manifest themselves as ‘values’ of things.”⁶² . It is the way unlike things appearing to be identical or equal, and the mode of thinking which can only consider them as equal, which is reification as a social phenomenon and as a process of thinking for Adorno.”⁶³

It should be mentioned that Adorno's interpretation of reification as immediacy and formal

58 ND 146

59 See O'Connor 2012: Chapter 3, Section 1

60 See Rose 1978: 43-4

61 Lukács 1971: 83

62 Marx 2013: 129

63 Rose 1978: 44

rationality, despite some differences is still much influenced by Lukács and his articulation of the specific form of rationalization that serves the commodity exchange when he asserts that with this reified rationality objects “assume increasingly the objective forms of the abstract elements of the conceptual systems of natural science and of the abstract substrata of the laws of nature”⁶⁴, and at the same time “the subject of this “action” likewise assumes increasingly the attitude of the pure observer of these – artificially abstract – processes, the attitude of the experimenter”⁶⁵. Both Lukacs and Adorno hold this Hegelian claim that there is nothing unmediated in the world, that there is no immediacy⁶⁶, and the given as it appears to us is not merely given, but mediated by human practices in a socio-economical context.

Adorno's negative dialectic is against this conceptual reification, by means of a permanent dynamic negation of rigid and reified definitions, and not determining the particulars isolated from their context as the unchangeable entities. Adorno explains that the “dialectical thought opposes reification in the further sense that it refuses to affirm individual things in their isolation and separateness: it designates isolation as precisely a product of the universal”⁶⁷. The non-identical, the utopia, is not something given and unchangeable which is abstracted from its socio-historical context, but rather it is mediated by human practices; as something that is to be. As Adorno explains, “the substance of concepts is to them both immanent, as far as the mind is concerned, and transcendent as far as being is concerned”, and “to be aware of this is to be able to get rid of concept fetishism”⁶⁸. The utopian non-identical is not a thing-like concept which has been emptied of its dynamic power, but it is an ontological entity which emerges in the rifts and crevices of the totalitarian system of epistemic concepts and a homogeneous society.

4. Utopia as an Emphatic Concept: 'What is, is more than it is.'⁶⁹

In Adorno's philosophy, the concept of utopia, similar to the concepts of freedom, humanity, and justice, is an emphatic concept. It means that it is a concept that gives perspective of something which does not exist yet, it is a concept that has a promise in itself. An emphatic concept is a

64 Lukács 1971: 131

65 Ibid.

66 See Hegel 1986: 66

67 MM §45

68 ND 12

69 ND 161

concept which predicates qualities to its referents that are not currently present in them.⁷⁰ Adorno has an anti-positivist attitude regarding conceptual system of knowledge and asserts that concepts themselves have a surplus over facticity; in a way that “what is, is not yet what it ought to be according to its concept.”⁷¹ What something is, is more than its actual existence; and this 'more' is not something which is imposed upon it, but instead it is immanent to it which only needs a cognitive subject to release this potential by means of the emphatic concepts which “mean beyond themselves”, as that of “being” at the beginning of Hegel's Logic⁷², Adorno explains, they point out to the non-conceptuality.

Non-identity thinking is not only considering that the object is more than its concept and the concept cannot grasp the object completely, but also reciprocally it means “that objects fail to realize the potential inherent in them that would make them adequate to concepts.”⁷³ There are hidden possibilities in concepts that point beyond the damaged life, and this is the utopian dimension of concepts. In “Why still philosophy?” Adorno emphasizes on the resistance of conceptual thought to mere “facts”, resistance against the status quo through the power of subject that gives objects what they lost by the process of objectification.⁷⁴

With the example of freedom as an emphatic concept, Adorno explains the idea of a non-existing “condition in which individuals would have qualities not to be ascribed to anyone here and now”⁷⁵, and this is precisely a utopian longing for a state of things in which the concepts and the objects can be reconciled through the fulfillment of all hidden potentials of both concepts and objects:

“[T]o a more emphatic concept, to one that is not simply the characteristic unit of the individual objects from which it was abstracted, the opposite applies as well. Emphatically conceived, the judgment that a man is free refers to the concept of freedom; but this concept in turn is more than is predicated of the man, and by other definitions the man is more than the concept of his freedom. The concept says not only that it is applicable to all individuals defined as free; it feeds on the idea of a condition in which individuals would have qualities not to be ascribed to anyone here and now. . . . But because it must always be also the concept of what it covers, it is to be confronted with what it covers... that “more” of the concept compared with his need. To this day, he will experience this “more” as his own negativity.” (ND 150-151)

70 See ND 151

71 Cook 2011: 28

72 ND 12

73 Cook 2011: 27

74 See CM 19

75 ND 150

Concepts in themselves are utopian, they carry the utopian ideas of a condition in which they can be fulfilled; thus applying an emphatic concept such as freedom to the individual in this socio-historical context of unfreedom, leads to a dialectical contradiction, and negative dialectics is the manifestation of this permanent contradiction till the emergence of Utopia which is the end of contradiction, and thus the end of dialectics as well. Emphatic concepts are descriptive and normative at the same time, descriptive of the falseness of here and now that blocks off the realization of the hidden possibilities and potentials of both concepts and objects; and normative as being the idea of a free and just society, the idea of utopia.

5. Possibility and Actuality of Utopia

The task of philosophy, as Adorno defines it, is criticizing and unmasking the ideologies which introduce themselves as the only form of actuality. Philosophy should break down the “force of the whole” and open up the possibility of the non-identical alternatives, the possibility of “the utopia of the whole truth [der ganzen Wahrheit], which is still to be actualized.”⁷⁶ Despite Hegel, Adorno believes that “the whole is untrue”, because the speculative reason cannot draw an enclosed circle of objects once and forever and there is always something which remains outside this circle; actuality is not an internally enclosed system of facts that is able to do justice to all its particulars.

What makes Utopia impossible is the concrete socio-historical context which exhibits itself as the whole actuality and the only possibility which can be real; it is the reification of the material context in the form of concepts of possibility and actuality, not the possibility and actuality themselves. Possibilities are blocked and suppressed by the coercive totalitarian status quo, but there are always unexpected events which do not follow a determinate causal chain of current actuality as a self-enclosed system, and these unexpected undetermined events have utopian potentials. These utopian possibilities are not illusionary as such, but in the context of a repressive society with its conceptual apparatus they seem impossible. As Kant in the Division II of the *Transcendental Logic* of the *Critique of Pure Reason* writes:

“Plato noted very that our power of cognition feels a far higher need than that of merely spelling out appearances according to a synthetic unity in order to be able to read them as experience, and that our reason naturally exalts itself to cognitions that go much too far for any object that experience can give ever to congruent, but that nonetheless have their

76 HTS 88

reality and are by no means merely figments of the brain.” (KrV, B 371)

In the same way, Adorno defines possibility as “the concept of something which is not, and yet is not merely nothing.”⁷⁷ The possible is neither fully non-actual nor fully actual and depending on the concrete situation, it can come to existence, or the existing actuality makes it too impotent to become actual.⁷⁸ This “middle possibility”⁷⁹, is the concept for something which is not what is considered as 'the real possible' in the context of here and now, nor it is an abstract, formal, and absurd possibility. This middle possibility is what he means by Utopia as the consciousness of possibility:

“[Utopia], the consciousness of possibility, clings to both the concrete and the undisfigured. Utopia is blocked by what is possible, never by immediate actuality; that is why what is possible seems abstract in the midst of what exists. Inextinguishable color comes from non-being. Thought, a piece of existence, serves non-being, which thought reaches, however negatively.” (ND 56-7)

Thus the Utopia is the emphatic and blocked possibility which is located between familiar real possibilities and formal abstract possibilities. Adorno asserts that the “negative dialectics penetrates its hardened objects via possibility—the possibility of which the objects' actuality has cheated them, but which is nevertheless visible in each one”⁸⁰. The possible is not positive, in the sense that it is what can become real in the concrete context of here and now, but the possible can be defined negatively, namely as what is different from the current actuality and negates this actuality as the mere ideology which blocks the actualization of possibilities and potentials of human life off.

In my opinion, Adorno tends to keep the concept of Utopia as a negative possibility, namely a possibility of something that is the negation of what actually exists, and we cannot have any knowledge of its content positively. The only possibility now, is the critique and determinate negation of whatever introduces itself as actuality; what Utopia can be, paradoxically, is something that we can have knowledge of it when we are actually in an utopian state of things. As Adorno writes, “in the right condition, as in the Jewish theologoumenon, all things would differ only a little from the way they are; but not even the least can be conceived now as it would be then”⁸¹. I consider Adorno as an epistemic negativist who declares that here and now our conceptual

77 ND, 393

78 See Bernstein 2001: 435

79 Macdonald 2017: 7

80 ND 52

81 Ibid. 298–9

knowledge cannot have any positive content for utopia. The only possible way is the 'determinate negation' of the existing actuality in order to opening up the space for the emergence of what is non-identical to our pre-existing concepts and categories, i.e. the emergence of utopia. This point is what I will analyze in the next section.

II. Thought and Nought

*“Consummate negativity, once
squarely faced,
delineates the mirror image of its
opposite.”
Minima Moralia §153*

1. Utopia as the Determinate Negation of Dystopia

As Adorno emphatically asserts, “utopia lies strictly, exclusively only in determinate negation”⁸². Through determinate negation of what exists, thought reveals false identifications and shows why the whole is not true. But what the true whole will be, thinking cannot anticipate in the condition of here and now. Determinate negation is in opposite to abstract negation of Skepticism, which is just the act of negating without any specification and concreteness; “‘determinate negativity’ does not receive from the sovereignty of the abstract concept any immunity against corrupting intuition, as does skepticism, for which the false as well as the true count as nothing.”⁸³ Adorno's negative dialectics as the determinate negation of falseness, is not a standpoint or a method, or unmediated reflection about things, but it is the reflection of what blocks us off to perceive things as they are and they can be. When the whole is negative and wrong, determinate negation negates the negative, but the result is not something positive under the spell of the wrong whole; and this is precisely how Adorno describes his negative dialectics, that in contrast to the Platonic and Hegelian definition of dialectics his work “ seeks to free dialectics from such affirmative traits without reducing its determinacy.”⁸⁴

Determinate negation is the immanent criticism of the falsehood in order to wrest the truth from ideology⁸⁵. Adorno believes that Utopia is essentially in the determined negation of the false, by referring to Spinoza's “verum index sui et falsi”, he asserts that “falsum index sui et veri”, i.e. “the

82 Tiedemann 1997: 142

83 DE 23

84 ND xix

85 See DE 18

true thing determines itself via the false thing, or via that which makes itself falsely known. And insofar as we are not allowed to cast the picture of utopia, insofar as we do not know what the correct thing would be, we know exactly, to be sure, what the false thing is.”⁸⁶In dialectical thinking each concept implies its opposite, thus unfreedom implies freedom and dystopia implies Utopia in a way that none of them can be conceived without the other one. Thus, in this dystopian time, the duty of thought is to determinately know and precisely express the false, and this itself is an index of what is right.⁸⁷ Each and every criticism and negation of the false, imperfect, and incomplete presupposes and longs for the right, perfect, and complete. Adorno describes the thought as a prism which make colorful different rays; thus “grayness could not fill us with despair if our minds did not harbor the concept of different colors, scattered traces of which are not absent from the negative whole. The traces always come from the past, and our hopes come from their counterpart, from that which was or is doomed.”⁸⁸

We may not know what the right and correct arrangement of human affairs and things must be, but what is false and in this particular and concrete knowledge and negation, the positive and the new may emerge, because the “consummate negativity, once squarely faced, delineates the mirror image of its opposite.”⁸⁹What Adorno defines as the “utopian thinking”⁹⁰, is the thinking that conceives difference from what exists. Thus, critical thinking is utopian thinking that does not give up the hope for a radically different world. It should recognize and unmask the false pictures of Utopia which present themselves as the true pictures; thus, one of the most important dimensions of critical thinking is the critique of ideologies.

The existing status quo has the tendency that through its hegemonic power and totalitarian apparatus becomes its own ideological justification, and introduces itself as the best possible world which can exist. In this regard, Adorno criticizes Hegel by asserting that Hegel “betrayed utopia by construing the existing as if it were the utopia of the absolute idea”⁹¹. Despite Hegel, Adorno believes that what exists is not right and rational just because it exists. The emancipatory critique of ideology must destroy whatever introduces itself as the natural order of things, must unmask whatever presents itself as necessary as it is just a mere contingency; and only after this, what is considered to be impossible seems possible. In the state of unfreedom, the only thing thought can do

86 SM 12

87 See CM 288

88 ND 377-8

89 MM §153

90 ND 313

91 AT 32

is to unveil the false that present itself as the right, because “thought as such, before all particular contents, is an act of negation, of resistance to that which is forced upon it.”⁹² Thought tends to go beyond what merely exists, beyond what is merely given; it revolts against “being importuned to bow to every immediate thing”⁹³. In *Minima Moralia* Adorno insists that what is essential to critical thought is just this “self-detachment from the weight of the factual, so that instead of merely reproducing being [thought] can, at once rigorous and free, determine it”⁹⁴; and the first step for determining things in an autonomous new way, is the determinate negation of the false state of things in the time of dystopia.

2. Resistance, Mündigkeit, and Madness: Against Unfreedom and Common Sense

In *Negative Dialectics* Adorno writes that “[f]reedom can be defined in negation only, corresponding to the concrete form of a specific unfreedom”⁹⁵. Kant defines the negative freedom as independency of being determined by the natural desires and inclinations, and the positive freedom as the self-legislation of the pure practical reason⁹⁶; But for Adorno negative freedom is the resistance against heteronomy and oppression of the dystopian totalitarian society, not against the natural impulses; and positive freedom – i.e. the ability of determining one’s own life by herself (autonomy) – is something which is impossible in an unfree society. As I explained it in the first chapter, freedom is directly related to the external world and “in ourselves, by introspection, we discover neither a positive freedom nor a positive unfreedom. We conceive both in their relation to extramental things: freedom as a polemical counter-image to the suffering brought on by social coercion; unfreedom as that coercion’s image.”⁹⁷

Adorno asserts that instead of defining freedom as the autonomy of a rational being (according to Kant), philosophy should analyze the concrete forms of unfreedom and articulate a form of resistance against them:

“[...] in this age of universal social repression, the picture of freedom against society lives in the crushed, abused individual’s features alone. Where that freedom will hide out at any moment in history cannot be decreed once for all. Freedom turns concrete in the changing forms of repression, as resistance to repression. There has been as much free

92 ND 19

93 Ibid.

94 MM 126-7

95 ND 231

96 See Kant 1996: 33

97 ND 223

will as there were men with the will to be free.” (ND 265)

In a totally administered society, the only form of freedom is the negative freedom as the resistance against the forms of wrong life which are the dominant forms of life in an unfree society. There is always the danger of elimination of any conception of freedom, justice, good life, in a word utopia, in a dystopian state of things which seems permanent, in a socio-historical context in which “no room is left for a concept of mankind that would resist absorption into the collective coercion of the system and reduction to the status of contingent individuals.”⁹⁸ Thus, for keeping the flame of utopian longing alive, one should become an active socio-political subject in order to rescue the suppressed hopes which are buried in the process of history. In Adorno's words:

“The only thing that can perhaps be said is that the right way of living today would consist in resistance to the forms of the wrong life that have been seen through and critically dissected by the most progressive minds. . . . So what I have in mind is the determinate negation of everything that has been seen through, and thus the ability to focus upon the power of resistance to all the things imposed on us, to everything the world has made of us, and intends to make of us, to a vastly greater degree.” (PM 167-8)

What makes the individuals able to resist, is what Kant named it maturity and responsibility (Mündigkeit). In “Education after Auschwitz” Adorno writes that “the single genuine power standing against the principle of Auschwitz is autonomy, if I might use the Kantian expression: the power of reflection, of self-determination, of not cooperating.”⁹⁹ Mündigkeit is the necessary condition for resistance against heteronomy; the ability of critical thinking and negating. In “What is Enlightenment?” Kant writes that “Enlightenment is man’s emergence from his self-incurred immaturity (Unmündigkeit). Immaturity is the inability to use one’s understanding without the guidance of another.”¹⁰⁰ For this maturity and responsibility, Adorno emphasizes, one should resist the concrete forms of heteronomy and unfreedom. The unfree society with all its institutions and system of norms, presents itself as a rigid and unchangeable state of affairs; thus, the courage of thinking and judging on one’s own understanding, should be the courage to critique, to resist the heteronomous society which legitimizes itself through its ideological apparatus.

Mündigkeit, using one's own understanding, is against what is considered as common sense, i.e. thinking in terms of established standards and values. As Adorno emphasizes the “dialectical reason

98 CM 113

99 Ibid. 195

100 Kant 1991: 54

is, when set against the dominant mode of reason, unreason: only in encompassing and cancelling this mode does it become itself reasonable.”¹⁰¹ Dialectic is not putting things in their correct position according to the common sense, but rather it is the negation of the existing order. Negative dialectics, once “has recognized the ruling universal order and its proportions as sick”, thus became the negation of this order and as a result, it would be considered “by the standards of that order, as itself sick, eccentric, paranoia – indeed, 'mad'”¹⁰². But the negative dialectics, the utopian thinking, is “the praise of folly”¹⁰³, that folly which is indeed the health and the truth:

“Thought that does not capitulate before wretched existence comes to nought before its criteria, truth becomes untruth, philosophy becomes folly. And yet philosophy cannot give up, lest idiocy triumph in actualized unreason [Widervernunft] ... Folly is truth in the shape that human beings must accept whenever, amid the untrue, they do not give up truth.” (ND 404)

Not from the perspective of common sense which is “the worldly eye schooled by the market”¹⁰⁴, but rather philosophy should look at the current state of things from the perspective of redemption; it must reveal the world “as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light”¹⁰⁵. The task of the utopian thought, the duty of the dialectician, “is thus to help this fools truth to attain its own reasons”, to give voice to the voiceless truth as we can see in the middle ages' 'Narrenliteratur' and in the contemporary authors such as Kafka and Proust who “prejudice and falsify the image of the world in order to shake off falsehood and prejudice”¹⁰⁶.

For remaining loyal to the idea of Utopia and keeping the critical distance to the dystopian world, one should detach herself from any collaboration, any social mixing and participation which means the acceptance of prevalent inhumanity. This is the unavoidable loneliness, the fool's loneliness as we see in Nietzsche.¹⁰⁷ Nietzsche, by making the horror and suffering of the world visible and not compromising with any norm and value of the false state of things, resists the normal state of things, the so called immutable order of the world, and by doing so, he keeps the space for a radically different world; and as Adorno describes it, this nihilism is the condition for the possibility of Utopia.

101 MM §45

102 Ibid.

103 Allusion to the title of Erasmus well known book *The Praise of Folly*

104 MM §45

105 Ibid. §153

106 Ibid. §45

107 See Ibid. 26

3. Nihilism, Despair, Suffering: The Utopian Urge

When the current state of things is 'radically evil', being desperate is the condition of attempting to overcome this despair, to find an alternative for the intolerable current situation. Refusing to participate in the world's business because it is actually a madness that presents itself as normality, is the first step for developing utopian critical thinking. In *Minima Moralia* in the aphorism titled "For Anatole France", Adorno quotes from a character of his novel that "it would be intolerable to believe that throughout the infinite universe there was nothing but eating and being eaten" and concludes that "the nihilistic revulsion in his words is not merely the psychological, but the objective condition of humanism as utopia."¹⁰⁸ This nihilism is not the identification with nothingness, but rather it implies something beyond, something is not yet. As Adorno describes them, "the true nihilists are the ones who oppose nihilism with their more and more faded positivities, the ones who are thus conspiring with all extant malice, and eventually with the destructive principle itself. Thought honors itself by defending what is damned as nihilism."¹⁰⁹

Recognizing and criticizing the emptiness and senselessness of the current world, by the standards and norms of this very order is damned as nihilism, but the power of the utopian thought – a thought that wants the radical change – is precisely in being nihilistic. This nihilism is in a dialectical relationship with hope, hope for another world in which things are different and right. As Adorno beautifully writes, "in these tears of despair, the ciphers appear as incandescent figures, dialectically, as compassion, comfort, and hope."¹¹⁰ Adorno considers the world as worse and better than hell at the same time. It is worse than hell because it seems that no transcendence is possible from its "closed context of immanence"¹¹¹; and at the same time it is better than hell because there is hope which initiates from despair, a paradoxical 'desperate hope' for breaking the world's ever-sameness, although this hope in the course of history has been always turned to despair. The dialectical utopian thought is the determinate negation of this despair over and over, because "he who dies in despair has lived his whole life in vain"¹¹².

The subtitle of Adorno's *Minima Moralia* is "Reflections from damaged life"; it means that when the moment of the realization of philosophy – the realization of Utopia – is lost, what we are left with is only a damaged life, if not a dead life. Thus philosophy takes the shape of a "melancholy

108 MM §48

109 ND 381

110 K 126

111 ND 403

112 MM §106

science”¹¹³, a lament for not being “the teaching of the good life”¹¹⁴ anymore. The main purpose of philosophy from the time immemorial, as Adorno defines it, has been providing the rational ground for human beings' well-being and happiness, but in the evil social-historical context of here and now in which people “are no more than component parts of machinery” and there is no capacity left for them to act as subjects, “there is life no longer”¹¹⁵. Therefore, philosophy and thought becomes negative, melancholic, and nihilistic

As Robert Pippin interprets Adorno's famous sentence “there is no right life in the wrong one”¹¹⁶, the negativity of the sentence can have two meanings: a. any attempt to lead a good life in a wrong society is in vain, b. in a totalitarian status, it is impossible that such an attempt, even the thought which initiates that attempt could arise.¹¹⁷ Here we have two different degree of negativity, one is a moderate negativity which leaves a space for hope, for a radical transformation of the society as a whole and make a right one. The other interpretation of Adorno's negativity is to consider him as an absolute negativist. If Adorno is an epistemic and ontologic negativist, namely neither Utopia exists and can come to existence, nor we are able to think about it because the coercive totality of existing society blocks off all our senses and understanding and we are not able to think anymore. If we accept the second interpretation of Adorno's negativity, i.e. the absolute negativism, then what does it mean to be critical? When we are not able to think differently at all because our consciousness is shaped within the context of this world? As I understand Adorno, even if we consider him as an absolute negativist, it does not touch his emphasis on critique and resistance, because the utopian longing is based on an urge, a negative urge because the current state of things is intolerable, not on an intellectual contemplation. As Adorno explains, “hope for better circumstances—if it is not mere illusion—is not so much based on the assurance that these circumstances would be guaranteed, durable, and final, but on the lack of respect for all that is so firmly rooted in the general suffering.”¹¹⁸ Thus, in the last chapter of *Negative Dialectic*, in second meditation of the twelve meditations about metaphysics where he analyzes the causes of the failure of Enlightenment which led to horrific historical catastrophes such as Auschwitz, Adorno introduces a 'new categorical imperative':

“A new categorical imperative has been imposed by Hitler upon unfree mankind: to arrange their thoughts and actions so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself, so that nothing

113 MM 15

114 Ibid.

115 Ibid.

116 MM§18

117 See Pippin 2005: 9

118 DE 225

similar will happen ... the new imperative gives us a bodily sensation of the moral addendum—bodily, because it is now the practical abhorrence of the unbearable physical agony to which individuals are exposed even with individuality about to vanish as a form of mental reflection. It is in the unvarnished materialistic motive only that morality survives.” (ND 365)

This new categorical imperative is a negative one which emanates from an absolute negative situation, and unlike the Kantian imperative is based on the bodily suffering, not on the formal rationality; it is based on 'the practical abhorrence of the unbearable physical agony'. The new categorical imperative is a somatic urge to seek for a “counter-image to the suffering brought on by social coercion”¹¹⁹, thus, longing for Utopia as a state free of the suffering, is a concrete materialist urge, not a universal abstract idea. The horrible events of history force metaphysics to join materialism, which is traditionally its antithesis. The Utopian is “the subject’s urge to express itself”¹²⁰, to express her suffering in order to find solutions for eliminating them; that is why “the need to lend a voice to suffering is a condition of all truth.”¹²¹ The bare materialistic motive, i.e. the “naked physical fear”¹²², the “tormentable bodies”¹²³ which necessitates the elimination of suffering, is the basis for critical utopian thought, for the all social and philosophical criticism, and for demanding the Utopia which rationally seems impossible.

In his discussion about the July 1944 assassination attempt on Hitler, Adorno explains the answer of one of the plotters to the question of why, despite the obvious signs of the failure of the plot and the danger of death, he still wanted to do this act. The answer was, “the fact is I just couldn’t put up with things the way they were any longer. . . I just followed the idea that anything would be better than for things to go on as they were.”¹²⁴ It is the intolerability of suffering, the hatred of dystopia not even the hope for utopia, that brings about an urge for demanding an alternative to the current state of things. In the current state of world, any positive action is only contribution to its falseness and can itself turn into another kind of coercion and oppression, such as all those historical utopian hopes which led to hell. Thus, any positive action is absolutely pointless, and the only thing which is left for us is an attempt, although perhaps in vain, to lend a voice to suffering, to resist as much as we can and try to unmask the falsehood.

Considering Adorno as an absolute negativist and his definition of the utopian longing as an urge

119 ND 223
120 Ibid. 17
121 Ibid.
122 Ibid. 286
123 Ibid.
124 HF 240

for redemption from suffering, brings the idea to mind that whether we can ascribe him some kind of emancipatory theology? Is his negative dialectic in fact a negative theology as some commentator such as Raymond Guess believe, when he contends that Adorno's negativity means that “we can have only a messianic hope in a total transformation of the society in which we live. This hope, however, would be for something that might come from outside the present and change our world utterly, that is, it is a hope for something that cannot even in principle be brought about by anything we could do”¹²⁵. In next section, I will analyze this issue, i.e. whether Adorno's conception of Utopia has any kind of theological connotation, and whether his urge for redemption from suffering necessitates to postulate a “wholly other” and a messianic intervention.

125 Guess 2005: 56

III. Inverse Theology

*Kennst du das Land? wo die Citronen blühn,
Im dunkeln Laub die Gold-Orangen glühn,
Ein sanfter Wind vom blauen Himmel weht,
Die Myrthe still und hoch der Lorbeer steht.
Kennst du es wohl?
Dahin! Dahin!
Mögt ich mit dir, o mein Geliebter, ziehn.
Goethe, 'Mignons Lied'*

In *Adorno and Theology*, Christopher Brittain classifies three different interpretations of the relation between Adorno's work and theology. First interpretation which is shared between some philosophers and theologians such as Jürgen Habermas, Albrecht Wellmer, Matthew Lamb, Ulf Liedke, and Michael Theunissen, considers Adorno's utopian longing as a longing for a 'wholly other'. In this case Adorno's negative dialectics is some sort of negative theology, i.e. some of its main terms such as the non-identical, the non-conceptual, and Bilderverbot share the same ground with negative theology. Second interpretation of Adorno's relation to theology, as we see in the work of philosopher Hent de Vries, suggests that Adorno's criticism of formal rationality points to the 'other of reason' but not the 'wholly other'; Adorno's philosophy seeks for another form of rationality without leaving it entirely behind, and has nothing to do with any kind of intuition or revelation. The third interpretation such as Helmut Peukert's interpretation, recognizes an absolute nihilism in Adorno's negativity which is not only a ban on any positive image, but also an absolute ban on any utopian imagination in general.¹²⁶ Thus, although it seems difficult to determine the kind of Adorno's relation to theology due to his different and sometimes contradictory positions, in this section I try to explain how I understand Adorno's relation to theology, which I consider as messianic materialism.

1. The Messianic Materialism: 'Where the danger is, also grows the saving power.'

In a letter to Walter Benjamin on 17 December 1934 wherein he talks about Benjamin essay on Franz Kafka, Adorno describes his work as 'inverse theology' and writes that "it seems to me doubly important that the image of theology, into which I would gladly see our thoughts dissolve, is none other than the very one which sustains your thought here – it could indeed be called an

¹²⁶ See Brittain 2010: 89-91

'inverse' theology. This position, directed against natural and supernatural interpretation alike."¹²⁷By 'inverse theology' Adorno means to look at "our earthy life from the perspective of redeemed life"¹²⁸, and the most important point regarding this perspective is that there is no transcendent 'standpoint of redemption', because what exists is only a 'closed system of immanence'. As Adorno by mentioning Kafka's novel *The Castle* asserts - despite some interpretations which suggest that the castle represents the divine grace whereas the village is the corrupt world of man - there is no other world other than our material world. He makes his position clear in the same letter when he explains that Kafka "represents a photograph of our earthy life from the perspective of redeemed life", and this redeemed life is not something above, something belongs to another world, but instead it is like the "edge of black cloth, whereas the terrifying distanced optics of the photographic image is none other than of the obliquely angled camera itself."¹²⁹This point is what he repeats in the closing aphorism, in the *Finale* of *Minima Moralia*¹³⁰. Therefore, it is helpful to analyze his conception of 'inverse theology' with regard to this aphorism. Adorno writes,

"The only philosophy which can be responsibly practised in face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption. Knowledge has no light but that shed on the world by redemption: all else is reconstruction, mere technique. Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light." (MM §153)

The standpoint of redemption must "displace and estrange the world" and gives us the ability to recognize how false the current state of things is. This materialist-messianic light shines from within, through the 'rifts and crevices' of the damaged life itself, similar to what Hölderlin said that 'where the danger is, also grows the saving power.'

Adorno's Utopia is not a u-topos, because there is nothing outside history and outside spatiotemporal world. His 'messianic light' is an immanent negative light, it does not illuminate the redeemed life, but reveals how hellish our current life is. Redemption presupposes a standpoint which is detached from the context, but thought cannot escape its situatedness, and remains distorted and tainted by the reality which it wants to negate. Therefore, thought remains negative, but this negativity works as a counter-image of the possibility of redemption, though this possibility

127 Adorno 2001: 66-67

128 Ibid 66

129 Ibid.

130 See MM § 153

maybe never be realized, “but the question of the reality or unreality of redemption itself hardly matters.”¹³¹

Adorno's secular redemption is the act of negating the concrete negative conditions which cause human beings' suffering. As he writes in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, “[d]ialectics discloses ... every image as script. It teaches us to read from its features the admission of falseness which cancels its power and hands it over to truth.”¹³² Considering the socio-economical condition as the cause of the emergence of religion shows the influence of Feuerbach and Marx on Adorno. Similar to Feuerbach, Adorno does not believe in any transcendental and divinely intervention in the course of history, and writes that “[i]f progress is equated with redemption as transcendental intervention per se, then it forfeits, along with the temporal dimension, its intelligible meaning and evaporates into ahistorical theology.”¹³³ He asserts that the anti-historical theology of otherness has its historical index, and this historical index is precisely what Feuerbach calls the 'anthropomorphic projectionism':

“I, by reducing theology to anthropology raise anthropology to theology, just as Christianity, by lowering God into man, made Man into god. Religion is the dream of the human mind. Religion sacrifices reality to the projected dream: the 'Beyond' is merely the 'Here' reflected in the mirror of imagination. Our essential task is now fulfilled. We have reduced the otherworldly, supernatural, and superhuman nature of God to the elements of human nature. We have arrived in the end to where we started from the beginning. The beginning, the center, and the final goal of religion is – Man.” (Feuerbach 2008: 49)

Feuerbach's argument is that human beings in the process of history projected the attributes of human's worldly life to a supernatural entity, and Adorno agrees with him when he considers his inverse theology as a position against “supernatural interpretation”, but at the same time his position is directed against the positivist interpretation of religion, as well.¹³⁴ In this regard, he is closer to Marx rather than to Feuerbach by bringing human real suffering into the focus. According to Marx,

“Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness. To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on

131 MM 247

132 DE 18

133 CM 147

134 See Adorno 2001: 67

them to give up a condition that requires illusions.” (Marx 1977: 131)

It is the concrete world which necessitates the creation of an abstract God, and the negation of this God must be the negation of this concrete situation in first place. For Marx, historical materialism is the inversion of the inverted picture of the world, “the world of people and the state and the society. This country and this society produce religion, an inverted world consciousness, because they are an inverted world.”¹³⁵In the same way, Adorno's inverse theology is along with Marx's materialist criticism of social condition which gives rise to religion, but his divergence from Marxian critique is his emphasis on a standpoint which is distanced from the damaged life, although very slightly. In Adorno's mind, it is not the power of collective subject, namely Proletariat, but the power of the hopeless negativity which can break through the rigid structure of ever-sameness and brings about redemption from suffering. Thus, inverse theology is neither a “natural” nor a “supernatural” intervention to the current state of things. Natural interpretation is a sheer positivism that Adorno considers it as 'the knowledge which has no light', which is 'the mere technique'; and a supernatural ahistorical interpretation is only a positive outmoded theology. His inverse theology is a messianic materialism, i.e., he asserts that the light of redemption shines from within, from the inner power of the material object, from the suffered and tortured bodies. In what follows I will elucidate what I consider as Adorno's messianic materialism.

2. Bilderverbot

Adorno frequently refers to the theological terms and motifs throughout his philosophical works, from *Dialectic of Enlightenment* to *Aesthetic Theory*. Perhaps the most significant one is his reference to 'Bilderverbot', namely the Old Testament's ban on making graven images of God: “You shall not make yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything in heaven or on earth beneath or in the waters under the earth.”¹³⁶ Bilderverbot is the main principle of negative theology, namely the Neoplatonic and Christian traditions which forbid the use of any positive attribute for describing the absolute Divine, because the Divine is utterly transcendent and ineffable, thus any positive description only gives a false image of it and, is a betrayal to what it really is. For Adorno, Bilderverbot functions as the refusal to paint any positive picture of Utopia with the colours from the existing world. He writes

135 Marx 2012: 1-2

136 Exod 20:4-5

“The materialist longing to grasp the thing aims at the opposite: it is only in the absence of images that the full object could be conceived. Such absence concurs with the theological ban on images. Materialism brought that ban into secular form by not permitting Utopia to be positively pictured; this is the substance of its negativity.”
(ND 207)

As he explains in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, this Jewish religion's prohibition of calling the name of God and the Bilderverbot, preserves the hope for the truth by not mistaking the false as the true, and the finite as the infinite, and reserves a blank page for the true picture of the Absolute.¹³⁷ But it should be considered that Adorno strongly rejects a notion of “the wholly Other” which is completely untainted by the socio-historical context and culture¹³⁸, and asserts that there can be no unmediated absolute Other. Insisting on immanence and rejecting vertical transcendence, Adorno considers the Other as a place-holder concept for something unknown and genuinely new, but not something spiritual and supernatural. De Vries calls this articulation of “the Other” in Adorno's thought as a “minimal theology” and describes Adorno's philosophy as “an interpretive concern with the other ... for which the religious tradition and its intellectual archives still offer the most promising concepts, arguments, rhetorical figures”¹³⁹.

It is the task of philosophy to provide a shelter for this immanent otherness and absorbs it to its rationality without sacrificing it. Since our current rationality is reductive and destructive of what is unknown to it, to preserve this otherness, namely Utopia, we shouldn't depict it positively. Any positive description – because of its situatedness and being rooted in the limited conceptual system that we have here and now – would be betrayal to what this otherness really is and can be. Thus, Adorno's negative materialism is along with the apophatic tradition of negative theology in not depicting the Other; but on the other hand this ban on images should not deprive the thought from its critical power and utopian longing. What Adorno means by using the negativity of Bilderverbot is to make the thought aware of not depicting false images, but not the abandonment of thinking and uttering the Other, i.e. the Utopia, in general.¹⁴⁰ In this world, notions such as Bilderverbot can easily serve the order of status quo, by expanding to such an extent that not only it prohibits the name of God, but also other concepts such as justice, freedom, equality, in a word the Utopia without any trace being left. In this case the ban is no longer protecting the utopian thought against the falsehood, but rather its purpose becomes reversed and it functions as a blockage to the possibility of Utopia by eliminating its thought.

137 See DE 23

138 See MCP 121-2

139 De Vries 2005: 56

140 See ND 401-2

Therefore, in my interpretation, Adorno's inverse theology is a messianic materialism, and not a material messianism. He believes that the light of redemption –although negatively– comes from this very material world; it is not a supernatural light from divine which comes to our material world and takes the shape of the matter as we see in the 'incarnation of Christ'. There is no 'wholly Other', and philosophy, as negative dialectics, as determinate negation, must insist upon recognizing the non-identical “uttering the unutterable”¹⁴¹ with rational concepts. Adorno describes “Wittgenstein’s maxim, ‘Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent’ as “utterly anti-philosophical”¹⁴² and believes that philosophy –by means of creating constellations and configurations of the elements of this very damaged life which work as a negative image, a counter-image– should depict an immanent Utopia:

“No absolute can be expressed otherwise than in topics and categories of immanence, although neither in its conditionality nor as its totality is immanence to be deified [vergöttern]. According to its own concept, metaphysics cannot be a deductive context of judgments about things in being, neither can it be conceived after the mode of an absolute otherness terribly defying thought. It would be possible only as a legible constellation of things in being. From those it would get the material without which it would not be; it would not transfigure the existence of its elements, however, but would bring them into a configuration in which the elements unite to form a script.” (ND, 407)

3. Death and the Resurrection of the Flesh

In a conversation with Ernst Bloch about Utopia, Adorno explains how without a conception of eternal life, no conception of Utopia is possible. He says, “to be sure, I believe that without the notion of an unfettered life, freed from death, the idea of utopia, the idea of *the* utopia, cannot even be thought at all ... [Utopia] cannot be conceived at all without the elimination of death; this is inherent in the very thought.”¹⁴³ He considers death as the absolute antithesis to happiness and fulfillment of human potentials, the anti-utopian par excellence which has a “very heavy consequences for the theory of knowledge about utopia”¹⁴⁴ in a way that makes it impossible to cast a picture of Utopia in a positive manner, because any possible picture of Utopia is “an attempt to avoid the antinomy of death and to speak about the elimination of death as if death did not exist”¹⁴⁵.

141 ND 9-10

142 HTS 101

143 SM 10

144 Ibid.

145 Ibid.

Therefore, death is the most profound reason “why one can actually talk about Utopia only in a negative way”¹⁴⁶. The ban on the positive image is not due to the absoluteness or unutterability of a wholly other, rather we cannot have a positive picture of Utopia because of the negativity of something material and concrete, namely death. The 'existence' of death makes any positive picture of Utopia impossible, thus the only way which remains for describing Utopia is negatively, to say what Utopia is not and should not be. For Adorno death has no positivity. Utopian longing is the desire of not reconciling with death, but longing for the death of death. And as long as the problem of death is unsolved, we are not able to have any positive picture of the utopian state of things. He is sympathetic to Kant when he asserts that the contemplation about death necessitates for reason to postulate immortality, a just hereafter, and a benevolent God. Despite Heidegger in considering death as the source of meaning, and his definition of 'Dasein' as a being-towards-death, Kant holds that 'the highest good', namely the unification of happiness and virtue, is possible only when we consider our soul as immortal, and a just hereafter in which good souls will happily live forever; what Adorno as a materialist does, is to add the body to this Kantian conception of immortality:

“At its most materialistic, materialism comes to agree with theology. Its great desire would be the resurrection of the flesh, a desire utterly foreign to idealism, the realm of the absolute spirit. The perspective vanishing point of historic materialism would be its self-sublimation, the spirit’s liberation from the primacy of material needs in their state of fulfillment. Only if the physical urge were quenched would the spirit be reconciled and would become that which it only promises while the spell of material conditions will not let it satisfy material needs.” (ND 207)

Self-sublimation of materialism at its highest point has the same desire as theology, namely the elimination of death. But what materialism considers and theology ignores, is the point that as long as the material needs are not satisfied, as long as the socio-economical context of the society does not allow the fulfillment of physical needs, spirit is only the promise of what it can be but cannot be realized because of these very material conditions which blocked its realization off. The utopian hope clings to the world which one day will be luminous with the redemption light, and to the suffered bodies which will be transfigured and redeemed from suffering. For Adorno, as I understand him, body is the locus of hope and promise, it is the topos for u-topia:

“The ideological untruth in the conception of transcendence is the separation of body and soul, a reflex of the division of labor. It leads to idolization of the *res cogitans* as the nature-controlling principle, and to the material denials that would founder on the concept of a transcendence beyond the context of guilt. But what hope clings to, as in Mignon’s song, is the transfigured body.” (ND 400)

146 Ibid.

Utopia is the idea of a world that would not only abolish the currently existing suffering, but also redeem the sufferings of the past¹⁴⁷; Utopia is the redemption of the past hopes¹⁴⁸, it is merging of the past, presence, and future in the moment of redemption.

Although Adorno's description of current state of world as 'radically evil' may appear to have much in common with gnosticism – for example when he makes a stance against Hegel and writes that “this world is the realm of evil”, or when he describes Beckett as similar to Gnostics for whom “the created world is radically evil, and its negation is the chance of another world that is not yet”¹⁴⁹— but he does not accept that the cause of the darkness of the world is the matter. For the gnostics, the material world which is created by a devil (or a dark spirit) is fundamentally evil; and the only possibility of redemption consists in the negation of any specific engagement with matter; The world is inherently evil and it should be totally transformed; and the more the world decays into nihilism, the closer it gets to the end-time of divinely redemption and this total transformation. But for Adorno, as I explained above, although the world should be totally transformed but this transformation is from within, and redemption is located in matter.

4. Metaphysical Experience: 'Transcendence from Within'

As I analyzed in the previous section, the experience of negativity and suffering brings about an urge for redemption. In the context of social coercion which attempts to normalize the suffering as a 'natural' and necessary part of life, demanding emancipation tends to take a theological form. As Adorno says, “here is [a] kind of trace of truth in the ontological proof of God, that is, unless the element of its reality is also already conveyed in the power of the concept itself, there could not only be no Utopia but there could also not be any thinking”¹⁵⁰. Thus, the possibility of something else, something which is not a part of the totalitarian system of the status quo, is the foundation of the utopian thinking, even the thinking in general; and religious teachings by asserting that “this can not be all” open up the space for the Other. Resisting despair and suffering consists in the possibility of this otherness, but the point is that Adorno defines this resistance and redemption as

147 See ND 403

148 DE xvii

149 ND 381

150 SM 16

immanent.

What Adorno wants, is to rescue the metaphysical values of truth, meaning, and transcendence but not in a theological manner, rather through his materialism; and this is what he means by “metaphysical experience”. Influenced by Benjamin, Adorno defines metaphysical experience as the promise of "a transcendence from within", a redemption which emerges from the 'rifts and crevices' of this damaged earthy life; Adorno's “transcendence is secularized, in more or less Hegelian fashion, into a picture of the whole of fulfilled immanence”¹⁵¹. He believes that metaphysics should give up some of its traditional concepts, such as immutability and universality, in order to rescue the other ones, such as truth, meaning, and redemption. In doing so Adorno himself wants to merge metaphysics with materialism by considering the ontological primacy of the matter which at the same time has a messianic function and can point out to something 'more' than what currently is. Then the transcendence is not vertical in a theological fashion, rather it is horizontal which takes place in the transient and the fragmentary parts of the corrupted system of this world, in a way that interrupts and undermines this system from within.

Adorno's 'metaphysical experience' has a double character; while it is a moment of transcendence and points toward an utopian state of redemption, it also makes us aware of the negativity and suffering of the self-enclosed system of immanent society, and by doing so, it provides a normative basis for critique and resistance. 'Metaphysical experience' is promise and critique at the same time. Other kinds of experiences (scientific, political, entertainment and so on) conform to the epistemic structure and ideological apparatus of the established society, but metaphysical experience penetrates everyday experience, criticizes and undermines it, and opens up the space for a genuinely utopian life.

The object of metaphysical experience may seem like an illusion, because if it looks real, it means that redemption is possible in the condition of here and now, and this is the betrayal to the true Utopia. But this illusory object of metaphysical experience is not just an illusion, it is the promise of a possibility which can be actualized. Adorno compares his notion of metaphysical experience to Kant's doctrine of the possible experience with all its conditions and limits. Although he agrees with Kant in rejecting any kind of non-sensual intuition, but he criticizes him for limiting experience to the a priori conditions for the possibility of experience, describing Kantian experience as a mere scientific experience, such as in physics and mathematics. For Adorno the

151 ND 400

Kantian formulation of experience is only a particular historical contingent form of human experience, not its universal form. He appreciates Kant for saving the intelligible sphere, a world that can only be thought but not known, and considers utopian dimensions hidden in it, but the problem which Kant could not solve is the reconciliation of the empirical and the intelligible spheres which then necessitates the postulation of another world, a hereafter for redemption from suffering and happiness. Adorno believes that we have only one world and the objects of his metaphysical experience are of this world, as we can see in genuine forms of language and art.

It seems to me that Adorno, with the notion of metaphysical experience – which can occur in language and art – gives a positive content to his conception of Utopia, although I think it is more or less a positive 'form' rather than a 'content'. In the next chapter I will analyze what I consider as Adorno's 'formal Utopia'.

Chapter Three: Utopia Formal

Before I start to analyze Adorno's notion of metaphysical experience of language and art, I would like to mention what I mean by 'formal' when I name Adorno's Utopia as a formal utopia. Adorno rejects Aristotelian metaphysical dichotomy of form and matter, and the primacy of form in his philosophy as well. In a same way he criticizes Kant for his formalism, especially when it comes to his formal morality, for ignoring the embodiment of human being, as I explained it before when I discussed the importance of the bodily suffering as the basis for the utopian longing.

What Adorno considers as one of the objects of the metaphysical experience is the mere form which can express the utopian potentials, in contrast to the content or meaning. But even this contrast is not that sharp and never take the shape of a dichotomy; as he asserts that “the task of philosophical discourse to attempt as far as possible to express as discourse—in other words, through the form in which it is presented— something of the content it wishes to convey. It is an essential feature of philosophy that form and content cannot be separated from each other.”¹⁵²In the context of a coercive society which blocks off all possibilities to define any utopian content, Adorno defends the mere genuine forms of expression in language and art; by considering an emancipatory potential in form which is not conferred from above or outside, but it is form's own self-emancipation. This is what Adorno calls “the agency of form”¹⁵³. In what follows, I will analyze these utopian functions of form.

I. Language

1. Word and Thing

As Adorno in *Negative Dialectic* emphasizes, philosophy has a linguistic nature¹⁵⁴. For him, the linguistic nature means that philosophy does not follow the positivist methods of science, because “the idea of science (Wissenschaft) is research;” but “that of philosophy is interpretation.”¹⁵⁵ With its interpretive linguistic efforts, philosophy tries to get closer to the thing, to the “thisness” of the

152 PMP 23

153 NL2 114

154 See ND 55

155 CM 126

thing. Despite what Hegel argues in the beginning of *Phenomenology of Spirit* – that thisness of objects “cannot reached by language” because language “belongs to consciousness, i.e. to that which is inherently universal,”¹⁵⁶– Adorno's philosophy is an attempt to find a way for expressing the very thing which in different philosophical traditions has been always considered as inexpressible by language. Like Husserl, he believes that philosophy should goes “to the things themselves”, but despite him, Adorno does not accept the primacy of the subject over the object and any kind of subjective imposing methods which subordinates objects under a priori categories¹⁵⁷.

Adorno's Utopia of knowledge “derives from the idea of a language in which word and thing unite without loss”¹⁵⁸; but the question is whether this reconciliation is possible? How word and thing can reconcile without any loss and residual of the thing which the word is incapable to express? Adorno asserts that it is the task of philosophy to make this reconciliation possible by finding an appropriate form for the linguistic expression which can give voice to the non-identical and “whatever is not merely significative in dealing with the object”; there is no intuitive way to capture the thing and “it is in language alone that like knows like”¹⁵⁹, therefore because of this affinity between the word and the thing, language is able to open up a space for the thing to express itself.

By introducing new forms for philosophical language through criticizing former forms of linguistic expressions, Adorno tries to solve the problem of reconciliation of word and thing. He criticizes the systematic and oppressive formal rationality of dogmatic metaphysics, as well as that of modern science; seeking for an alternative transvalued form of thought and expression which gives voice to the voiceless particular objects. He asserts that there is a “philosophical urge to express the inexpressible”¹⁶⁰ - against Wittgenstein’s well-known maxim 'whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent'¹⁶¹ which Adorno describes it as utterly anti-philosophical - therefore language must find a way to utter the unutterable, the non-identical, the Utopia.

2. The Heresy of Form: Constellation, Essay, Parataxis

Considering the priority of the object over the subject in his dialectical approach, Adorno seeks for

156 See Hegel 1977: 66

157 See CM 13

158 See Tiedemann 1997: 123-146

159 ND 56

160 Ibid. 108

161 See Wittgenstein 2007: 7

a way of expression which is not constituted by systematic concepts and categories, rather those linguistic forms which give space to the object to express itself. For him, the “dialectics—literally: language as the organon of thought— would mean to attempt a critical rescue of the rhetorical element, a mutual approximation of thing and expression, to the point where the difference fades”¹⁶². As Guilian Rose mentions about Adorno’s writing style, his “‘methods’ present seminal ideas; they are not devices imposed on material in order to organize and explain it. ‘Method’ (and even more ‘style’) means for him the relation between ideas and the composition of texts.”¹⁶³

Strongly influenced by Benjamin, Adorno introduces the notion of 'constellation' which is an arrangement of concepts gathering together in order to say “the unsayable” without imposing the violence of a systematic unifying order of the positivist language:

“The constellation illuminates the specific side of the object, the side which to a classifying procedure is either a matter of indifference or a burden . . . By themselves, constellations represent from without what that concept has cut away within: the surplus which the concept is equally desirous and incapable of being. By gathering around the object of cognition, the concepts potentially determine the object’s interior. They attain, in thinking, what was necessarily excised from thinking.” (ND 162)

The concepts of a constellation are not reducible to each other, but for conveying the object they are in a mutual relation to each other. Objects need interpretation, and interpretation necessitates that subject opens up new horizons in which the new, the ineffable, the Utopia can present itself.

The essayistic/fragmentary form of writing is an example of what Adorno means by constellation, so that “the very method of the essay expresses the utopian intention.”¹⁶⁴ In the essayistic form of expression, all concepts, sentences, and paragraphs are in a equal relation to each other without any hierarchical order, and the meaning of each concept is only understandable in the context of other concepts, in the configuration that all these concepts build together. Adorno calls this constellation of concepts also a 'force-field' and writes that “under the essay's glance every intellectual artifact must transform itself into a force field.”¹⁶⁵ In constellations, in fragments and essays, there is no center and all elements have their own equal place; as Adorno describes it, “the essay owes its freedom in its choice of objects, its sovereignty vis-à-vis all priorities of fact or theory to the circumstance that for it all objects are equally near the center, to the principle that casts a spell over

162 ND 56

163 Rose 1978: 11

164 Essay 161

165 Ibid.

everything.”¹⁶⁶

The fragmentary form as a constellation/configuration/force-field, is alive and discontinuous as life itself, which stands in opposition to rigid, frozen, and dominant identity-thinking’s logical system of expression. The conceptually clear and comprehensible analytic language affirms domination, therefore an alternative language must negate repression by means of a radical criticism of dominant forms of expression in order to build a new form of expression; as Adorno emphasizes, “all philosophical critique is today possible as the critique of language.”¹⁶⁷

Adorno’s own style is a protest against reducing thought to logical systematic order. By expressing complexity, multiplicity, and contradictions, his writing style is a permanent dialectic. Identity thinking, as the systematic assertion of resemblance, looks for similarities and subordinate all individual and particular objects under the universal concepts and categories; in contrast, the fragmentary thinking and writing emphasize on differences by considering ‘things beyond resemblance’. In fragmentary style, in contrast to unified logical systems, there is no prior pattern or structure into which the objects under examination should be fitted; rather, the structure of the fragmentary (aphoristic/essayistic) text is formed by the content. There is no distinction between form and content, rather they coexist in an interdependent historical relation. The form is determined by the object itself, so that it is not something arbitrary, blindly, and automatically posited by the subject. As Adorno puts it:

“The distinction between form and content in philosophical language is not a disjunction in an eternity without history. It belongs specifically to idealist thought and corresponds to the idealist distinction between the form and content of knowledge. It is based on the view that concepts and, with them, words are abbreviations of a multiplicity of characteristics whose unity is constituted solely by consciousness. If the unity of the manifold is subjectively imprinted as form, such form is necessarily thought as separable from content.” (Theses 35)

The form of constellation represents “a dialectically intertwined and explicatively indissoluble unity of concept and thing”¹⁶⁸ and is a protest against reified language, concept fetishism, priority of concepts and categories on particular objects, and the ahistorical notion of truth in idealist philosophies. Because “the law of the innermost form of the essay is heresy. By transgressing the orthodoxy of thought, something becomes visible in the object which it is orthodoxy’s secret

166 Ibid. 167

167 Theses 38

168 Ibid.

purpose to keep invisible.”¹⁶⁹ Thus, the essay as an emancipatory form, by means of its unorthodoxy to the status quo and its ideological ways of thinking and expressing, is both a utopian form, and the form of expressing Utopia. Critique of both the idealist philosophies and the positivist sciences is the critique of the hierarchical logical order which has the main importance for both traditions and strongly affects their form of expressions, one with its systematic ambiguity and the other with its systematic clearance. Their hierarchical logical order brings all fragments of experience under a subjectively posited unity and subsume particulars in universals. In contrary, the constellation is heresy to this hierarchy.

An example for this heresy is Hölderlin's parataxis which Adorno analyzes it in his essay “Parataxis: On Hölderlin’s Late Poetry”. In this essay Adorno praises Hölderlin's heresy to the usual logical ways of making sense in writing. Parataxis is a rhetorical way of placing the sentences and phrases one after another without any subordination to each other or to general logical rules. In this fashion, Hölderlin’s parataxes, Adorno writes, are “artificial disturbances that evade the logical hierarchy of a subordinating syntax”¹⁷⁰. Hölderlin “searches for a linguistic form that would escape the dictates of spirit’s own synthesizing principle”¹⁷¹ and resists thought's natural tendency for identification of the new with its old common concepts and forms. His parataxis “puts explication without deduction in the place of a so-called train of thought. This gives form its primacy over content, even the intellectual content”¹⁷²; so that the text becomes free of deduction and stay immanent to itself without any external syllogistic logic.

Another important point which should be considered is that expressing the genuinely new content, i.e. the Utopia, needs a genuinely new form, but we can not invent a totally new language; therefore, the only possible way is making distance from the common communicative language by trying to make new constellations of concepts and words. Thus, unlike the traditional rhetoric that “has always been a form of thought which accommodated itself to communicative language”, aphoristic and essayistic writings are not aimed to satisfaction of their audience; they distinguished themselves “from the scientific mode of communication, traces of the communicative with which science dispenses”¹⁷³. In “These on the Language of the Philosopher”, Adorno explains that in the context of falsehood – a society which is dystopian – the communicative language serves the purposes of the system and blocks off new thoughts find their expression:

169 Essay 171

170 NL2 131

171 Ibid.

172 Ibid. 132

173 Essay 168

“The demand for the ‘understandability’ of philosophical language – for its societal communicability – is idealist... The abstract, idealist demand for the adequation of language to object and society is the exact opposite of linguistic reality. In atomized, disintegrated society, constituting language by taking audible being into consideration romanticizes a state of ontological obligation of words to feign, [a state] that is instantly denied by the impotence of the words themselves. In the absence of unified society there is no objective language and therefore no truthfully communicative language.” (Theses, 36)

In a same way in In his essay “Aldous Huxley and Utopia”, he explains how in a society in which everything seems well-done and in order – in a technologically developed society which is in fact an administered society– no one thinks anymore and therefore there is no real talk between its members, thus communication is just chattering and empty small talks. So that “the virtual transformation of the world into commodities, the predetermination by the machinery of society of everything that is thought or done, renders speaking illusory; under the curse of perpetual sameness it disintegrates into a series of analytic judgments.”¹⁷⁴In a totally administered society, common usage of language and communication just reflect the wrongness of status quo in the language level. Adorno uses the examples of Kafka's and Beckett's characters, who are silent and wordless and do not communicate as an act of resistance to the radically false world. In this dystopian world, any communication is just the affirmation of what currently exists; thus the non-communicative language is a nonconformist attitude with utopian hopes for a right world, 'another world which is not yet'.

3. Utopian Content of the Utopian Form

Adorno attempts to find the utopian forms for expressing the utopian contents. Instead of repetition of the ever-sameness, philosophical language must free itself from dominant concepts and categories of the identity-thinking and attempt to grasp the new by means of the new forms. Adorno explaining this point by criticizing Kantian epistemology:

“What in the content of his thought Kant projects as the goal of reason, utopia, the production of humanity, is disbarred by the form of his thought, the theory of knowledge; it forbids reason to go beyond the realm of experience, which, caught in the machinery of mere material and unchangeable categories, is reduced to that which always was. But the object of the essay is the new as something genuinely new, as

174 CM 100

something not translatable back into the staleness of already existing forms.” (Essay 169)

Rescuing this genuinely new, this non-identical, from the coercion of the a priori conceptual system of knowledge, is rescuing 'the name'; names which are particular whereas concepts are universal; thus “this is the font of the only [conceptual] constellations which inherited some of the hope of the name.”¹⁷⁵ Adorno's emphasis on name –which is influenced by Benjamin– is redeeming the particulars by assigning them their particular names. Benjamin defines the name as the identity of an object from the vantage point of an infinite being¹⁷⁶. In his interpretation the name is the identity conferred on each object by Adam before the Fall, therefore it is the essence of thing and is able to redeem the thing as it is. But human language is structured with concepts which are universal and as a result, human beings lost insight into the nature of reality. Concepts reify experience and block us off from experiencing things in their unique being, but names contain the utopian hope for the otherness which we do not know it yet.

Utopian language does not conform with what exists because the world is not “everything that is the case”¹⁷⁷. As I explained it before, Adorno has an anti-positivist stance regarding the language and believes that there is always something more than what actually exists, that “no concept would be thinkable, indeed none would be possible without the ‘more’ [das Mehr] that makes a language of language”¹⁷⁸, and the constellations try to express this 'more'. The essayistic and fragmentary form of language is anti-systematic and against any given totality. Its object is the transitory particular which the essay tries to grasp it in a flash of light, by means of constellations of concepts and words. In both traditional and analytic philosophies this attitude is considered as a weakness, because for them the real is the eternal and the factual, but As Adorno asserts, this “weakness testifies to the non-identity that it has to express, as well as to that excess of intention over its object, and thereby it points to that Utopia which is blocked out by the classification of the world into the eternal and the transitory. In the emphatic essay, thought gets rid of the traditional idea of truth”¹⁷⁹. Instead of claiming the absolute and stable (Platonic) truth, fragmentary style “frees itself from the stipulation of those attributes which since the definition in the Symposium have been ascribed to ideas.”¹⁸⁰

175 ND 53

176 See Benjamin 1996: 62-74

177 See Wittgenstein 2007: 1

178 ND 112

179 Essay 159

180 Ibid 170

Philosophy, as Adorno defines it, is the persistence on the claim of truth, of Utopia, without being certain about what it precisely can be, because “nothing more is given to it than fleeting, disappearing traces within the riddle figures of that which exists and their astonishing entwinings”¹⁸¹. Utopian longing of thought is to search for the “fresh concepts not yet encompassed by the general pattern”, the fresh concept which “is the last hope for thought”¹⁸². Constellations, essays, and parataxes are the forms of both expressing and giving content to this utopian longing; they are the forms of expression which have no fear of failure and fallibility, because “the truth of ideas is bound up with the possibility of their being wrong, the possibility of their failure”¹⁸³. The new is always the result of a process of try and error, and the essayist – despite the treatise writer– questions, tastes, feels, and reflects his subject-matter, and puts into words what the object itself allows to express.¹⁸⁴ Error is an essential part of the criticizing and questioning process, and it is a sign of resistance against the totalitarian system of status quo. Adorno asserts that this fallibility and provisional nature of essay is presented in its name and writes that “the word "essay"¹⁸⁵- in which thought's utopia of hitting the bull's eye unites with the consciousness of its own fallibility and provisional nature - indicates something, like most historically surviving terminologies, about the form.”¹⁸⁶The fragmentary form, in the time of dystopia in which everything is scattered and fragmented, is the 'reflection from the damaged life', and with its critical and emancipatory aspects tries to give voice to the object which suffers in silence; its criticism of the status qua has an inner relation to the utopian hope for redemption without any affirmation of the current state of things, because “for the happiness . . . the essay has no other name than the negative.”¹⁸⁷

Adorno’s purpose of defending fragmentary form of expression in a time that “life doesn’t live”¹⁸⁸ anymore, is an attempt to give voice to the transient moments of life which the unificatory identity-thinking of the repressive society buries them under its common sense and communicative language. The essayist, similar to the lyric poet, uses “an imaginary language, and in that imaginary language he perceives what would be possible, but never took place, in its composition”¹⁸⁹and by doing so, the utopian non-identical can take refuge in the form of essays and parataxes form the coercive totality.

181 CM 126

182 MM §41

183 MCP 144

184 See Essay 165

185 Der Versuch

186 Essay 164

187 Ibid. 171

188 The epigraph of *Minima Moralia* which is quoted from Ferdinand Kuernberger

189 NL1 52-3

II. ART

By “art”, Adorno mostly means the European literature and music between 1750 and 1950, namely the artworks from Bach to Beckett.¹⁹⁰ He emphasizes that “every artwork must ask itself if and how it can exist as Utopia”¹⁹¹, therefore what can be entitled as the utopian artworks are those works of art which function both as critique and as ideal. As critique, work of art shows the falsehood, and as ideal, it indicates the possibilities of a radically different world, namely the Utopia.

1. Utopian Artwork: Mimetic or Meontic?

A utopian artwork has mimetic and meontic functions at the same time. Its mimesis does not mean imitating and reflecting the reality as it is, but instead, the utopian artwork does an 'inverse mimesis' in that the “reality ought to imitate artwork.”¹⁹² Works of art are the most radical forms of social criticism and do not conform to society's totalitarian coercion; instead, they open a path for the utopian through the criticism of what exists, through criticism of dystopia. The meontic function of the artwork is its potential in pointing out to another state of things and depicting what has not been seen or experienced, and artwork does this in a negative fashion by means of its form. As Raymond Guess explains it:

“Modern art ... should be negatively utopian in both senses, i.e., it should show that the world in which we live is as bad as could be—because it is—and also show that the only (utopian) hope is for a society which we can characterize only negatively—all we can say about such a society is that it would be radically different from the one we now have.” (Guess 2005: 172)

In this dystopian world, what genuine art does, is the negation of falsehood, in a way that this negative image of collapse works as a counter-image for the utopian state of things. Thus, “a cryptogram of the new is the image of collapse; only by virtue of the absolute negativity of collapse does art enunciate the unspeakable: Utopia. In this image of collapse all the stigmata of the repulsive and loathsome in modern art gather”¹⁹³. In the context of the permanent catastrophe, it is

190 See Finlayson 2012: 393

191 AT 312

192 AT 199

193 AT 32

the betrayal to the Utopia if works of art depict any positive picture of it in a way that it seems realizable in the dystopian condition of here and now.

This is the reality that should assimilate itself with the artwork, and the artwork with the non-identical¹⁹⁴, with the Other; this is what the inverse mimesis means. Artwork makes a “refuge for mimetic behavior”¹⁹⁵, with its inverse mimetic impulse it imitates and represents “the other”, it has the desire to be like the non-identical; thus this mimesis is an utopian attitude “which could shake the structure of domination”¹⁹⁶. Similar to his inverse theology also in his aesthetics Adorno asserts that “the doctrine of imitation should be reversed; in a sublimated sense, reality should imitate the artworks”¹⁹⁷.

The utopian artwork exists in the form of the remembrance and recollection of something non-existing, something that even in the past was a dream and could have never been actualized. Artwork with its meontic power “signals the possibility of the non-existing”¹⁹⁸. It is *hiraeth*¹⁹⁹, longing for a home that perhaps never was. A true artwork is a mixture of nostalgia and melancholia which resists to the falsehood of here and now. Utopia is considered as a lost paradise by the genuine artwork, as something which is lost and may never come to happen again:

“The tenebrous has become the plenipotentiary of that Utopia. But because for art, Utopia—the yet-to-exist—is draped in black, it remains in all its mediations recollection; recollection of the possible in opposition to the actual that suppresses it; it is the imaginary reparation of the catastrophe of world history; it is freedom, which under the spell of necessity did not—and may not ever—come to pass. Art's *metexis* in the tenebrous, its negativity, is implicit in its tense relation to permanent catastrophe.” (AT 135)

Artwork should be beyond resemblance and positive mimesis with anything which exists, only in this way it can remain faithful to the Utopia. The utopian motives of works of art are negations of what *is*, and resisting against it. When Utopia is blocked by the dystopian conditions of a totally administered society, work of art is only the longing for the Utopia and doesn't provide any positive picture which can be just a false Utopia. Thus, the genuine artwork is not representational; it does not represent anything from the untrue whole, and the potential of a radically different society lies in this very characteristic. Genuine artwork exists in this world but it is not of this world and with

194 See AT 134

195 AT 79

196 MM 154

197 AT 181

198 AT 132

199 A Welsh word for which there is no English translation. Its meaning could be describe as longing and sadness for a home which is lost.

its meontic character it functions as “the promise of otherness”²⁰⁰.

Utopian artworks are purposeless, useless, and enigmatic. We cannot interpret them with our current concepts and categories, because in capitalist societies with their prominent form of thinking, namely identity-thinking and instrumental reason, we are shaped in a way to consider everything for the purpose of something else. In “the fungible world of barter”, radical utopian art resists this instrumental rationality and commodity fetishism by its negativity and nihilism for the sake of being faithful to the Utopia which is the Kantian 'kingdom of ends'; Adorno, by mentioning the nihilistic works of Kafka, writes:

“What art, notably the art decried as nihilistic, says in refraining from judgments is that everything is not just nothing. If it were, whatever is would be pale, colorless, indifferent. No light falls on men and things without reflecting transcendence. Indelible from the resistance to the fungible world of barter is the resistance of the eye that does not want the colors of the world to fade.” (ND, 403-4)

Art's semblance to negativity is “a promise of non-semblance”²⁰¹. The utopian artwork is a permanent melancholic dissonance, such as Schönberg's atonal music or Kafka's and Beckett's writings. Genuine artwork does not depict a reconciliation with falsehood, with the evils of the world, but rather it is only the promise of a true reconciliation in a utopian state of affairs. Thus, “through the irreconcilable renunciation of the semblance of reconciliation, art holds fast to the promise of reconciliation in the midst of the unreconciled.”²⁰² The utopian artwork takes the shape of catastrophe in order to criticize it, and this is the negative mimesis of the work of art. Similar to thought's resistance against identity-thinking to which thought inherently is attracted, work of art resists against its desire for the aesthetic harmony and organic unity. Through its form the utopian artwork depicts the dystopian state of things, and this is perhaps the best way for rescuing utopian hopes.

2. Montage as the Form of the Utopian Artwork: Negation of Unity, Harmony, and Synthesis

The critical power of artwork is in its form alone and not in any content or meaning. Adorno criticizes those politically engaged authors such as Brecht and Sartre for considering specific content and function for the artwork, and instead, he appreciates Kafka and Proust, because the

200 Bernstein 2001: 436
201 ND 404
202 AT 33

critical power of their work is in its form, not in any certain content or meaning; “what these works say, is not what their words say”²⁰³, rather how their forms are. As I explained it before, Adorno asserts that the utopian artwork must transcend the reality, not just reflecting it; and this transcendence is not via aesthetic harmony, but rather with its failure to have any harmony in the context of inharmonic damaged life:

“That factor in a work of art which enables it to transcend reality certainly cannot be detached from style; but it does not consist of the harmony actually realized, of any doubtful unity of form and content, within and without, of individual and society; it is to be found in those features in which discrepancy appears: in the necessary failure of the passionate striving for identity.” (DE 131)

The content of artwork is historical and therefore it changes from time to time. The classical works of art – such as Beethoven's and Bach's compositions – have utopian content in a positive way; they depict freedom, justice, and beauty. But the modern artwork, because of its situatedness in the socio-historical context which is a series of nightmares, cannot have any positive content; this is why Adorno strongly asserts that “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric”²⁰⁴. The utopian artwork has no presupposition about the truth, and its truth-content is concept-less. It builds its own content and in the process of this building, the truth emerges itself. Here we can see also the command of Bilderverbot in order to save the space for the emergence of the real Utopia. Thus, the utopian artwork makes a wordless, imageless truth-content only with its specific form. By negating the pre-existing meanings, by its meaninglessness, the artwork itself creates meaning. The utopian artworks are the “works of the highest level of form that are meaningless or alien to meaning”, therefore they are “more than simply meaningless because they gain their content [Gehalt] through the negation of meaning”²⁰⁵. Similar to the notion of constellation which Adorno introduced as the true form of the linguistic expression, he introduces the notion of 'montage' as the true form of the utopian artwork. Montage is a constellation of different elements without any imposed subjective unity: “Artworks, however, that negate meaning must also necessarily be disrupted in their unity; this is the function of montage, which disavows unity through the emerging disparateness of the parts at the same time that, as a principle of form, it reaffirms unity”²⁰⁶.

The utopian artwork is the promise of what does not exist yet, through the negation of what exists.

203 AT 184
204 Prisms 34
205 AT 154
206 Ibid. 155

In an absolutely negative world, the autonomous artwork is compelled to be absolutely negative, but this very negativity is a promise, the promise of something genuinely new, the Utopia. In the context of the capitalist exchange society, work of art protests against fungibility and identity with any pre-existing definitions and meanings. With its non-fungibility and non-identity it expresses its unique existence. The utopian artwork is the process of making itself in the form of montage, it is never complete and never identical with any rigid meaning or content; it does not go under subject's cognitive spell, and demonstrates its independency by rejecting to carry any imposed meaning or content. As Adorno writes,

“Art wants to admit its powerlessness vis-a-vis late-capitalist totality and to initiate its abrogation. Montage is the inner-aesthetic capitulation of art to what stands heterogeneously opposed to it. The negation of synthesis becomes a principle of form. In this, montage unconsciously takes its lead from a nominalistic Utopia: one in which the pure facts are mediated by neither form nor concept and irremediably divest themselves of their facticity.” (AT 155)

Nominalistic Utopia is a placeholder for all utopian contents and forms. In the age of collapse, the utopian artwork is a disintegrated combination of form and content which neither a specific form nor a specific content. It has no form, no content, but it is not nothing. By determinate negation of any definite form and content, work of art demonstrates its weakness and its power at the same time; its weakness in front of the totalitarian capitalist hegemony which leaves no space for the aesthetic harmony, therefore work of art take the shape of dissonance and a disintegrated fragmentary form and brings the antinomies and antagonisms of the concrete socio-historical context into focus. But its power is precisely in this non-harmonic form, because it preserves the place for the non-existent, for the utopia. As Adorno contends, artwork is a “constellation of the existing and non-existing” and this is “the utopic figure of art”²⁰⁷. By making a constellation of damaged and fragmented parts of the existing, artwork by its meontic character says “what is more than the existing”²⁰⁸.

The Utopian artwork by means of its form demonstrates the utopian desire of immortality. Through its negativity, it goes beyond the nature-dominated laws and the principle of self-preservation which is the main principle of capitalist instrumental thinking. As Adorno writes, the “autonomous art is a work of contrived immortality, Utopia and hubris in one; scrutinized from another planet they

207 AT 233
208 Ibid. 133

would all seem Egyptian”, so that through their forms “they are protected from decomposition”²⁰⁹. The utopian artwork is the sphere in which the other can come to existence; by configuration and reconfiguration of different elements, by its creativity, by its aesthetic composition and decomposition, the artwork makes the new possible, and this is how it can exist as the Utopia. It is in the genuine artwork that the non-identical, the non-conceptual, the ineffable can “flash out abruptly” and “overcome its own impossibility”²¹⁰.

In the context of the damaged life, artworks are “damaged, fragmentary, and bear the scars of their resistance to the social world.”²¹¹The utopian in the work of art is not its actualized organic harmony between part and whole, but the failure to reach this harmony and reconciliation. Art, by demanding the impossible and failing to capture it, demonstrates the hope for an emancipated world in which this reconciliation would be possible. In the context of culture industry, the autonomous work of art resists to be identical as a cultural commodity, therefore, in this context the real successful artworks are the failed ones. As Adorno writes, “art works of the highest rank are distinguished from the others not through their success—for in what have they succeeded?—but through the manner of their failure”²¹². Their failure is not because of the impossibility of the Utopia as such, but rather because of the brokenness and falsehood of the society in here and now.²¹³Adorno describes the utopian artwork's failure and negativity by referring to Beckett's characters and writes that “the minimal promise of happiness which they contain, which refuses to be traded for any consolation, was to be had only at the price of a thoroughgoing articulation, to the point of wordlessness.”²¹⁴

3. Art as 'the ever broken promise of happiness'²¹⁵

“Stendhal's dictum about the promesse du bonheur²¹⁶ says that art thanks existence by accentuating what in existence prefigures utopia. This is a diminishing resource, since existence increasingly mirrors only itself. Consequently art is ever less able to mirror existence. Because any happiness that one might take from or find in what exists is false, a mere substitute, art has to break its promise in order to keep it.” (AT, 311)

209 AT 139

210 NL1 50

211 Finlayson 2012: 405

212 B 99

213 See Brittain 2010: 177

214 NL2 90

215 AT 136

216 “La beauté n'est que la promesse de bonheur.” (Beauty is nothing but the promise of happiness.)

To promise something means to give hope. Thus, with all its negativity and hopelessness, how the artwork can be the promise of happiness? Artwork does not promise the happiness which capitalist ideology introduces as the only form of happiness, but promise the real one by its negativity and criticism of the existing world; “by their negativity, even as total negation, artworks make a promise”²¹⁷. Non-utilitarian logic of artwork is against bourgeois' instrumental reason. Artwork is the critique of any activity and participation in this world in which the brutal self-preservation still rules. The utopian work of art is beyond praxis, it is purposeless and useless; it resists to have any positive role at the heart of status quo, to be a commodity in the exchange society. By doing so, work of art demonstrates that it does not fit in this world, and thus there should be a totally different world. This is in the genuine work or art that we can experience “how sickly seem all growing things.”²¹⁸²¹⁹, and as long as there is negativity and suffering in this world, no real happiness is possible. But the work of art by its very existence still is a promise of happiness, by being not part of this 'sound and fury'²²⁰ of capitalist progress towards hell, by just “being, nothing else”²²¹. Thus, artwork is the promise of happiness by being only the promise of happiness, not the actualization of happiness. It is a pledge of what has not been yet, and maybe never will be. It's the happiness that is promised to Proust by village names, in a way that “one thinks that going there would bring the fulfillment, as if there were such a thing. Being really there makes the promise recede like a rainbow. And yet one is not disappointed.”²²²

217 AT 135

218 “Wie scheint doch alles Werdende so krank.” Line from Georg Trakl's *Heiterer Frühling*

219 MM §45

220“— To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,

Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,

To the last syllable of recorded time;

And all our yesterdays have lighted fools

The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player

That struts and frets his hour upon the stage

And then is heard no more. It is a tale

Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury

Signifying nothing.” (Shakespeare: *Macbeth*, Act V, Scene V)

221 MM 157

222 ND 373

Chapter Four: Utopia Regained²²³

1. Utopia as the State of Reconciliation

As Adorno in *Negative Dialectics* asserts, “dialectics serves reconciliation”²²⁴; the purpose of determinate negation and negative dialectic is reaching to the utopian state of reconciliation²²⁵ in which all particulars freely coexist in a true whole. As I analyzed in the first chapter, Enlightenment's utopian promise of reconciliation failed because reason lost its critical and revolutionary function and turned into a formal-instrumental rationality for the purpose of power, domination, and self-preservation. This situation has been continued till today and “as long as the world is as it is, all pictures of reconciliation, peace, and quiet resemble the picture of death.”²²⁶In this chapter I will analyze what Adorno means by different levels of reconciliation and the conditions for the possibility of the utopian state of reconciliation.

2. Reconciliation of Subject and Object

What Adorno means by epistemic reconciliation? He asserts that “reconciliation would release the nonidentical”²²⁷; which means that the epistemic ideal is the recognition of individuality and nonidentity of the particular objects. The state of the reconciled conceptual knowledge is a state in which the universal concept “no longer contains a particular within it as a bad, negative element”²²⁸ but instead tries to find a way to express it, as I explained Adorno's notion of conceptual constellations in the third chapter. Reconciliation is a non-subsumptive and non-coercive universal/particular, subject/object relation by considering that the full object cannot be completely captured by conceptual knowledge. Dialectic remains negative, precisely because of this non-identity and inadequacy of universal concepts relating to their objects.

The critique of identity-thinking is the critique of the 'constitutive subjectivity' by means of the power of subject itself. Thought must redeem itself from identity-thinking and the presupposition

223 Allusion to the last band of Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* with the title *Time Regained*

224 ND 6

225 See Jay 2001: 262

226 ND 381

227 ND 6

228 HF 13

that the object is wholly graspable for subjective conceptual knowledge. Adorno emphasizes on “the strength of the subject to break through the fallacy of constitutive subjectivity”²²⁹ because we have no other way around a knowledge which only can be obtained by the subjective concepts and categories; As Adorno explains,

“an object can be conceived only by a subject but always remains something other than the subject whereas a subject by its very nature is from the outset an object as well. Not even as an idea can we conceive a subject that is not an object; but we can conceive an object that is not a subject. To be an object also is part of the meaning of subjectivity; but it is not equally part of the meaning of objectivity to be a subject.” (ND 183)

Thus objects have primacy over subject because of two reasons: first, all subjects are objects whereas not all objects are subjects; second, the activity of subjects presupposes objects, whereas the objects does not presuppose subjects. This activity is subjective knowledge which without objects is empty, à la Kant. At the same time, there is a fundamental affinity between object and subject because of their shared material basis in the spatiotemporal world; and this affinity is precisely what makes it possible for the subject to know objects. According to Bernstein, this “affinity represents the indeterminate idea of our immersion in and being parts of nature, ontologically and epistemologically.”²³⁰ Negative dialectics is due to the irreconcilability of subject and object²³¹ in the context of negative whole, but in a right state of things which is the end of contradictions and dialectics, subject and object would coexist with each other without any loss and sacrifice of the non-identical. As Adorno describes it, “in its proper place, even epistemologically, the relationship of subject and object would lie in the realization of peace among men as well as between men and their Other. Peace is the state of distinctness without domination, with the distinct participating in each other.”²³²

3. Reconciliation of Nature and Reason: The End of Suppression

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer by using the Odyssey – “as one of the earliest representative documents of bourgeois Western civilization”²³³– explain the process of repression and renunciation of the inner nature of humans in the process of civilization, “the not

229 HF 13

230 Bernstein 2001: 291

231 MM 246

232 CM 247

233 DE xviii

merely theoretical but practical tendency toward self-destruction”²³⁴. In Homer's epic poem, Odysseus in order to resist against Sirens' song, ordered his men to bind him to the mast of ship, and plug their own ears with wax, so that they could continue to reach the destination. Adorno and Horkheimer assert that this is precisely the process of civilization which necessitates repression and renunciation. Adorno believes that the wrongness of our conceptual knowledge and the identity-thinking are rooted in the long history of the repression of inner and outer nature in order to having control over objects and over other subjects.

Using Freudian lexicons, Adorno describes this repression as “the ego's rule over the id”²³⁵. Civilized individuals should have control over their desires and inclinations, so that all their behaviors would be rational. But this rational effort is in vain, since these repressed impulses undermine the purity of the rational ego. This repression appears in pathogenic states when “the I has its unfreedom demonstrated to it – by the feeling that ‘this isn't me at all’”²³⁶. Therefore, in the process of civilization when the subjects cut themselves off from the nature and deny themselves as the parts of nature over which they want to have control, the very purpose of self-preservation becomes void because they start to repress themselves. As Adorno writes,

“at the moment when human beings cut themselves off from the consciousness of themselves as nature, all the purposes for which they keep themselves alive - social progress, the heightening of material and intellectual forces, indeed, consciousness itself - become void ... in other words, self-preservation destroys the very thing which is to be preserved.” (DE 42-3)

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, *Negative Dialectics*, *Minima Moralia*, *Aesthetic Theory*, in a word throughout his philosophical works, Adorno tries to find an alternative rationality for the Enlightenment's formal rationality, an alternative which could escape the predicaments of the identity-thinking without leaving behind rationality entirely. In doing so, he introduces his notion of 'the addendum', which is the representative of the reconciliation of reason and nature, and indicates a status in which nature (inner and outer) would be neither blind (as Enlightenment rightly tried to emancipate human beings from natural blind forces), nor oppressed (despite the repressive Enlightenment's formal rationality)²³⁷. Adorno asserts that the critical negation of the repressive conception of reason – as something beyond nature that has control over it – by means of considering it as a part of nature would provide the possibility of the reconciliation of nature and

234 DE xix

235 ND 273

236 Ibid. 222

237 See ND 229

reason, and as a result, the possibility of emancipation and the emergence of the Utopia.

In a four pages long section in *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno discusses his notion of 'the addendum' (or 'the additional factor')²³⁸; before that, in his *Lectures on History and Freedom* for the first time he introduced this concept.²³⁹ Although he asserts that this term is “somewhat arbitrary chosen”²⁴⁰, but he considers it a proper term because it refers to a mental-somatic element which should be added to the pure reason, so that a free action can occur. Adorno explains that the moment of consciousness and the moment of a physical impulse “are by no means separately experienced; but philosophical analysis has tailored the phenomenon in such a way that afterwards, in philosophical language, it simply cannot be put otherwise than as if something else were added to rationality”²⁴¹, and this is what he means by 'the addendum'.

The addendum is a ‘placeholder concept’²⁴² for the all impulses which are necessary for the occurrence of a free and spontaneous act. These impulses are the origin of our experience and understanding of freedom, “the dawning sense of freedom feeds upon the memory of the archaic impulse not yet steered by any solid I”²⁴³. Adorno’s conception of addendum is influenced by Freudian theory of instinct and the genesis of consciousness. Similar to instinct as something frontier between the mind and the body, Adorno’s addendum is both somatic and mental. By genetic approach of psychoanalysis Freud asserts that the complex cognitive functions of human developed for satisfying our instinctual needs. In “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes”, Freud explains that “an ‘instinct’ appears to us as a concept on the frontier between the mental and the somatic, as the psychical representative of the stimuli originating from within the organism and reaching the mind, as a measure of the demand made upon the mind for work in consequence of its connection with the body”²⁴⁴. Adorno adopts this approach and asserts that human reason is not an atemporal givens, i.e. a faculty that human beings have had in the same form at all times. On the contrary, he claims that reason, the Ego, “is not something immediate” but rather it “has arisen; to speak in psychoanalytic terms: it has branched off from the diffuse energy of the libido”²⁴⁵. However, by referring to the genetic fallacy, Adorno asserts that one must free oneself “completely and utterly from the idea that everything that has ever existed is able to preserve itself in a form identical with

238 Das Hinzutretende

239 See HF 183

240 Ibid. 229

241 ND 229

242 Jütten 2012: 258

243 ND 221

244 Freud 1989: 566

245 ND 271

what it once was”²⁴⁶. He claims that “it is possible [...] for something age-old to survive and nevertheless to become radically different from what it originally was”²⁴⁷, and this is precisely how he understands the mind-body relation, the way in which consciousness emerged from instinct. Mind-body dualism is a pre-dialectical problem which is involved with the question of a 'first', thus this is the duty of dialectics – with a non-dualistic and non-reductionist attitude – to break through this dualism by asserting that “all mental things are modified physical impulses”²⁴⁸, therefore, there is no radical separation between reason and nature and this is “the only source of whatever hope the mind can have”²⁴⁹ for an utopian reconciled states of being.

As mentioned in the first chapter, according to the Enlightenment’s rationality which is reflected in Kant's philosophy, our experience of freedom is an experience based on the pure practical reason; but Adorno considers this conception of freedom as a repressive and non-emancipatory concept which is precisely in contrast to the autonomy that Kant defended. Therefore, by introducing the addendum as a factor which indicates the reconciliation of reason and natural impulses, Adorno asserts that “without an anamnesis of the untamed impulse that precedes the ego—an impulse later banished to the zone of un-free bondage to nature—it would be impossible to derive the idea of freedom”²⁵⁰. In the archaic pre-modern world reason was not considered as something outside the nature, but in 'modern times', as we see in the Cartesian dualism, modern philosophers started to make a dichotomy of reason and nature. Adorno's addendum is the denial of this dualism:

“The addendum has an aspect which under rationalistic rules is irrational. It denies the Cartesian dualism of *res extensa* and *res cogitans*, in which the addendum, as mental, is lumped with the *res cogitans*, regardless of the difference that separates it from the thought. The addendum is an impulse, the rudiment of a phase in which the dualism of extramental and intramental was not thoroughly consolidated yet, neither volitively bridgeable nor an ontological ultimate.” (ND 228)

Adorno elucidates the problem of this modern dualism of reason and nature, consciousness and impulse, inner and outer, theory and practice, by the example Shakespeare’s Hamlet. Hamlet is “an outstanding example of a reflective person”²⁵¹²⁵², who because of the unbridgeable gap between his

246 HF 236

247 Ibid.

248 ND 202

249 Ibid. 203

250 Ibid. 221-2

251 HF 231

252 “Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;

And thus the native hue of resolution Is sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought,

And enterprises of great pitch and moment With this regard their currents turn away,

impulse of revenge and his rational reflections, is not able to obtain his father's revenge from his uncle. What he needed, as Adorno puts it, is an archaic desire which is not compatible with the rational, bourgeois order of things²⁵³. Adorno considers the addendum as the solution for Hamlet's problem of theory and practice; practice, needs theoretical consciousness, and on the other hand it needs a corporeal element, a bodily impulse which is not fully identical with reason:

“[I]n yielding to impulse we find that what I have called the Hamlet syndrome has for a moment been overcome. The sense of being divided, of being between inner and outer, is overcome as in a flash ... Thus the phantasm of freedom may be said to be something like a reconciliation of spirit, the union of reason and nature as it survives in this impulse.” (HF 237)

This impulse, the addendum, is the moment of the reconciliation of reason and nature, “it is a flash of light between the poles of something long past, something grown all but unrecognizable, and that which some day might come to be.”²⁵⁴ Thus the addendum “not only points back to an earlier stage of history in which human behavior was largely reactive and reflexive, but also points forwards to a stage where nature and mind may finally be reconciled”²⁵⁵, and this stage is the Utopia. The utopian states of things is neither a regression to the fearful state of the blind nature's forces, nor the states of the dualism of subject and object which leads to the repression of human nature and other beings.

Adorno's non-dualistic and non-reductionist position regarding the mind-body problem opens up the space for the possibility of a utopian state of affairs in which nature and reason will be reconciled and human beings can live in freedom and peace. As I explained in the first chapter, one of the main themes of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is that human being is still under the spell of self-preservation, but not anymore because of the determination of blind nature, rather as a result of an unfree and totally administered society which operates as a second blind nature and deprives humans of their own freedom and happiness. Thus any critique of oppression should consider social oppression as well, because “if the social process of production and reproduction were transparent for the subjects, if the subjects determined that process, they would no longer be passively buffeted by the ominous storms of life”²⁵⁶, and it could be the prologue for the realization of utopia.

and lose the name of action.”

(Shakespeare: Hamlet Prince of Denmark, Act 3: Scene 1)

253 See HF 234-5

254 ND 229

255 Cook 2011: 54

256 ND 263

4. Reconciliation of Individual and Society

Adorno argues that our false understanding of nature and reason is a result of a false society in which we live, so that for the reconciliation of nature and reason, there should be first the reconciliation of the individual and society which is a condition for the possibility of the former reconciliation. In a free society all our conceptions would be different, and that is the point which has been always ignored in the history of philosophy. As Adorno puts it, “the claim that social-historical contents are nevertheless supposed to be only indirectly important compared with the immediate life of the individual is a simple self-delusion of an individualistic society and ideology”²⁵⁷. This is the ideology of a totalitarian unfree society that deceptively pretends that individuals are free and injustice and inequality is only the normal and 'natural' way of social life. In a false society which is 'ruled by devil', there can be no reconciled ego, no individual happiness, no private Utopia, because “there is no right life in the wrongness”²⁵⁸.

Utopia is not a Robinson Crusoe's island. No individual right life is possible when the whole is wrong. Therefore, the emancipation of the society as a whole is the condition of the emancipation of the individuals. An emancipated society is not a compulsive state, instead, it is the realization of universality through reconciliation of different particulars by preserving their differences. In a right society, every individual, every non-identical, feels at home, and this is precisely the meaning of the Utopia.

As I explained in the first chapter, in the history of utopian longing, such as in Plato, Bacon, and Campanella, the Utopia is always defined as the realization of humanity through rational social institutions; but the problem of reconciliation of the individual with society without any sacrifice remains unsolved till present. There are always pessimist philosophers and thinkers who see no possibility of this reconciliation; such as Max Weber who argued that there is no acceptable alternative to the 'iron cage' of the capitalism, or Freud who was skeptical about the possibility of finding any non-repressive alternative to civilization by warning against any regress to the blind natural state by asserting that a state of nature would be far harder to bear”²⁵⁹ than the civilization. Adorno, in my opinion, gives the primacy to the individual, but with considering the point that without the context of a right social life, no individual right life is possible. Throughout his work,

257 Essay 158

258 MM §18

259 Freud 1989: 15

he constantly emphasizes that “it is only in the right society that chances for the right life will arise”²⁶⁰. The goal of the establishment of a society as humanity, is indeed the freedom and well-being of the individual. As I understand Adorno, he is an individualist when he asserts that “humanity can be thought only through this extreme form of differentiation, individuation, not as a comprehensive generic concept”²⁶¹; but the point is that he demands the fulfillment of the potentials of *all* individuals not only the privileged ones, and this, necessitate the transformation of the society as a whole.

5. Utopia: The State of Eternal Peace and Happiness

Adorno's Utopia is the right human society in which different individuals coexist with each other. It is similar to what Kant calls it 'the kingdom of ends', a society in which all human beings are the ends, not the means for some other humans' ends. Establishing this right society needs the avoidance of falsehood in first place. Adorno asserts that a truly emancipated society would be "the realization of universality in the reconciliation of differences"²⁶², such a society would be a society in which "people can be different without fear"²⁶³; in this society human beings no longer exist in a dialectical opposition to society, and that is why the Utopia is the end of dialectics.²⁶⁴

Individual freedom and happiness, i.e. the individual Utopia, is not possible as long as there is suffering and oppression in this dystopian totalitarian world. Thus, any Stoic or Epicurean account of inward happiness and ataraxia is doomed to fail. Here again, similar to all other concepts of Adorno's philosophy we have a dialectical movement between the right and false forms of happiness, and the path to the right one passes through the negation of the false one. The problem of happiness by means of the satisfaction of desires, is when all desires are shaped by the culture industry, satisfying them just leads to a false life and a deeper dissatisfaction. So called 'given' and 'inherent' desires and inclinations are in fact the internalized social norms and images, that is why Adorno talks about the “true pleasure” which take refuge in the negation of false happiness, in the negativity of art and philosophy.

The utopian idea of happiness differs from the egoist and self-centered hedonism which Adorno

260 ND 396

261 CM151

262 MM 103

263 Ibid.

264 See CM 99

criticizes by referring to decadence of the 'Jugendstil', asserting that "decadence mistakes the particularity of happiness, which it must insist upon, for immediate utopia, for realized humanity"²⁶⁵. Thus the problem is insufficiency of the individual happiness which if it cannot exist in a context of a right society, it would be vulnerable and fragile. There is always the danger that the brainwashed individual in the context of culture industry start to define their happiness in a way that they are furtively compelled to do. Adorno explains this falseness of the individual happiness in the false context of the culture industry by referring to art, as I analyzed in chapter two. He writes that

"Because all happiness found in the status quo is an ersatz and false, art must break its promise in order to stay true to it. But the consciousness of people, especially that of the masses who in an antagonistic society are separated by cultural privilege from consciousness of such a dialectic, holds fast to the promise of happiness; rightfully so, but in its immediate, material form. This provides an opening for the culture industry, which plans for and exploits the need for happiness. The culture industry has its element of truth in its fulfillment of a need that originates in the ever increasing renunciation demanded by society; but the sort of concessions it provides renders it absolutely false."
(AT 311)

The goal of this criticism, of the determinate negation of falseness, is not another similar replacement such as 'the fulfillment of all potentials', as it is celebrated in bourgeois society; the satisfaction of false needs which are created by the conceptual apparatus of that society. As Adorno in *Minima Moralia* writes, "it is not man's lapse into luxurious indolence that is to be feared, but the savage spread of the social under the mask of universal nature, the collective as a blind fury of activity"²⁶⁶. The emancipated society is a society freed from blind progress and production, "the true society will grow tired of development and, out of freedom, leave possibilities unused, instead of storming under a confused compulsion to the conquest of strange stars."²⁶⁷

Thus, against the capitalist definition of happiness as to have and to do as much as possible, Adorno defines the utopian state of happiness as a state of being in peace and having individual simple delights. I consider this as Adorno's negative individualistic hedonism. In contrast to that much emphasize on rationality which in the modern times took the shape of instrumental rationality and led to those nightmares and catastrophes and to the exploitation of people and nature in the name of progress, Adorno asserts that he would rather prefer to find the valid idea of truth in locating the utopia in the "blind somatic pleasure"²⁶⁸. He disagrees with Plato, Aristoteles, and Kant

265 CM 152
266 MM §100
267 Ibid.
268 MM §37

in their mere rational definition of happiness, and makes a definition which seems to be a combination of Rousseauan and Freudian ideas. An account of happiness which recognizes the origin of all human's evil in the society and civilization and seeks for emancipation in somatic satisfaction. But the important point which must be considered is that Adorno's hedonism is not that of the archetype of Dionysian orgic hedonism, such as what we see in the 'world turned upside down' tradition in 'Saturnalia', 'the Feast of Fools', 'The Land of Cockaigne', and different versions of Carnival. Although there is some trace of truth in placing the poor and oppressed in positions of power and freedom, and their supposed superiors under them, though temporarily for a day or week; but this is again just the inversion of the world as it is by making the positions reversed, it is only the collective's fury and greed for the bodily pleasures of eating, drinking, and sex, to which Adorno expresses a nihilistic revulsion. By referring to Anatole France's Monsieur Bergeret's words that "it would be intolerable to believe that throughout the infinite universe there was nothing but eating and being eaten"²⁶⁹, and Adorno describes the 'nihilistic revulsion' not merely psychological, "but the objective condition of humanism as utopia."²⁷⁰

Therefore, Adorno's Utopia is humanism, is the individual life in the context of peace, freedom, and equality and reaching to this state of things necessitates the radical critique of everything which prevent it to be realized, the criticism of whatever is considered as happiness in a capitalist exchange society. For a true happiness, Adorno gives the example of love which is in contrast to bourgeois exchange values, and writes that in love, "both must give something, happiness, as precisely what is not exchangeable, not open to complaint, but such giving is inseparable from taking...There is no love that is not an echo."²⁷¹ Thus, Adorno's negative individualist hedonism, is the negation of false forms of happiness, negation of what the collective consider as happiness in the capitalist societies. For Adorno, the thought itself "is happiness, even where it defines unhappiness: by enunciating it."²⁷² As well as critique, the genuine work of art, as we saw in the previous chapter, is the promise of happiness, but for those who negates the falseness of here and now and let themselves to enter the world of the authentic art. For the realization of the true happiness, in the context of this world we should pay attention to "the real and far more urgent calamity that prevents the Utopia from being realized. It is idle to bemoan what will become of men when hunger and distress have disappeared from the world."²⁷³ Thus, the true utopian longing is negating and criticizing the present miseries and distresses of human life, in order to arrive in the

269 See Ibid. §48

270 Ibid.

271 Ibid. 217

272 CM 293

273 Prisms 116

state of peace, “a state of distinctness without domination”²⁷⁴ in which all individuals live a happy right life:

“Rien faire comme une bête, lying on water and looking peacefully at the sky, 'being, nothing else, without any further definition and fulfilment', might take the place of process, act, satisfaction, and so truly keep the promise of dialectical logic that it would culminate in its origin. None of the abstract concepts comes closer to fulfilled Utopia than that of eternal peace.” (MM §100)

274 CM 500

Conclusion

Throughout this master's thesis I argued that Adorno is a utopian thinker, and his conception of Utopia is a constellation of negative, messianic-materialistic, formal, and individualistic definitions of Utopia. In different chapters and sections of my work I tried to articulate my interpretation of Adorno's concept of Utopia. I started with the question of whether, and how, the lost utopian hopes of Enlightenment can be regained. In second chapter I argued how one conception of Adorno's constellation of Utopia is the negative Utopia. One aspect of the negative Utopia is its critical power. In this sense, Utopia is the determinate negation of Dystopia. Other aspect of defining Utopia as negative, is an absolute negativism. It means that the dystopian state of things blocks off the actuality, and even the possibility of the Utopia, in a way that not only we cannot have any positive definition of it, but also the utopian thinking as such is impossible. In this regard I consider Adorno as an absolute negativist with a dialectical approach. Although he asserts that "the most progressive minds"²⁷⁵ are able to see through and critically dissect "the forms of the wrong life"²⁷⁶ to which we must resist, but even that mind is marked "by the same distortion and indigence which it seeks to escape."²⁷⁷ Adorno believes that having a utopian vision is impossible because it presuppose a standpoint which must be detached from the dystopian context but transcendence is impossible, at the same time the thought still must comprehend its own impossibility for the sake of the possible. This is the dialectical relation of despair and hope in Adorno's utopian thought. Philosophy today, is the melancholic longing for the lost Utopia, by trying to recall and redeem the past hopes. The question of whether this "wishful thinking"²⁷⁸ can be fulfilled, "the reality or unreality of redemption itself hardly matters"²⁷⁹. In the age of Dystopia, the task of dialectical thought, according to Adorno, is the determinate negation of falsehood. As long as there is domination and repression in inner and outer nature, i.e., in thought and in society, dialectical thought will remain negative, because dialectics is 'the ontology of the wrong state of things'. In this work I analyzed how negative dialectics is the recognition of what is non-identical to thought's concepts and categories. The non-identical is the condition for the possibility of Utopia, in that it indicates there is something 'more' than what our conceptual system of knowledge can comprehend, and this 'more' is the utopian. Adorno's 'utopia of cognition' is the self-criticism of concepts for the purpose of

275 PM 167

276 Ibid.

277 MM 247

278 Ibid. 197

279 Ibid. 247

expressing the utopian non-identical without any reduction, unification, and sacrifice. This is what emphatic concepts, by giving the perspective and promise of something more which does not exist yet, can do. The utopian longing, more than being on the basis of the rational reflections, is based on the abhorrence of suffering. Longing for Utopia is loathing of Dystopia. It is a concrete materialist urge which necessitates an alternative to the current state of things. I interpret Adorno's inverse theology as messianic materialism which maintains that it is the tormented body which is the hope and promise of redemption. In third chapter I explained how in the dystopian context of here and now, there are utopian moments of 'the metaphysical experience' in language and art, and this is what I called it Adorno's formal Utopia. In a coercive society which blocks off all possibilities of any utopian content, the mere forms of expression in language and art can be utopian, with an emancipatory power which belongs to the mere form. The forms of 'constellation', 'essay', and 'parataxis' are the utopian forms of expression and the forms of the expression of the Utopia, the emancipatory forms which are heresy to all hierarchical imposed order. The utopian artwork is a promise of happiness with its purposelessness which is against the instrumental rationality of capitalism and its culture industry. By means of its inverse mimesis and its meontic aspects, the utopian artwork indicates the possibilities of a radically different world, an emancipated world in which harmony and reconciliation would be possible. In the last chapter of my work, I analyzed what Adorno means by the notion of reconciliation, and how I understand his conception of Utopia as a state of reconciliation in which object and subject, body and mind, and individual and society are reconciled. I analyzed Adorno's concept of 'addendum' that indicates that the state of reconciliation of nature and reason is a state of neither blind nor repressed nature, but rather it is a utopian state of emancipation of inner (ego) and outer nature (society).

I conclude this work with a discussion about Adorno's definition of Utopia as the state of eternal peace. In opposition to the blind progress of capitalism and its emphasis on activity and fulfillment of all potentials, Adorno defines the utopian state of being as the state of just 'being and nothing else', a state in which "lying on water and looking peacefully at the sky ... take the place of process, act, and satisfaction"²⁸⁰. This account of Utopia at the first glance seems like a modern version of Stoic ataraxia and apatheia. As I read Adorno, he has a dialectical stand between some kind of Epicurean individualistic hedonism in one hand, and commitment and responsibility to the suffering of the others in the other hand. That is the reason why the lifestyle of 'Genuss', 'Hygge', and 'Lagom' – a form of life that emphasizes on being relaxed and taking it easy in a self-enclosed environment like the garden of Epicurus – is a false formula for happiness, which Adorno in a sarcastic way

280 See MM 157

describes as “a formula borrowed from the language of the nursing-home”²⁸¹. Although Adorno defends the individual happiness in front of a coercive totalitarian capitalist society and its instrumental rationality which considers individuals just as the appendages of its machinery, but at the same time he criticizes what he calls the “coldness upon those who suffer”²⁸² which is “the basic principle of bourgeois subjectivity”²⁸³. As I explained in the last chapter of this thesis, as long as there is war, hunger, inequality, distress and any kind of suffering and misery in the world as a whole, no individual Utopia can be possible. Empathy and solidarity with tormented bodies²⁸⁴ is the condition for the possibility of a reconciled utopian state of being. All definitions of Utopia in Adorno's thought make a constellation for illuminating the idea of the eternal peace, the state of true happiness for *all* individuals in a society which is established as humanity.

281 Ibid. 217

282 ND 347

283 Ibid. 363

284 See Ibid. 286

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Erklärung

„Ich versichere hiermit, dass die Masterarbeit mit dem Titel „Adorno's Concept of Utopia“ von mir selbst und ohne jede unerlaubte Hilfe angefertigt wurde, dass sie noch an keiner anderen Hochschule zur Prüfung vorgelegen hat und dass sie weder ganz noch in Auszügen veröffentlicht worden ist. Die Stellen der Arbeit – einschließlich Tabellen, Karten, Abbildungen usw. –, die anderen Werken dem Wortlaut oder dem Sinn nach entnommen sind, habe ich in jedem einzelnen Fall kenntlich gemacht.“

Köln, am 07.03.2017

Safoura Erfanmanesh