The Persistence of Resistance and the Emancipatory Power of the Aesthetic: On Negt and Kluge's Critical Theory

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With the [First] World War a process began to become apparent which has not halted since then. Was it not noticeable at the end of the war that men returned from the battlefield grown silent—not richer, but poorer in communicable experience? What ten years later was poured out in the flood of war books was anything but experience that goes from mouth to mouth. And there was nothing remarkable about that. For never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by political power. A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn tramcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body.

Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller.'

The emblem of intelligence is the feeler of the snail, the creature "with the fumbling face," with which, if we can believe Mephistopheles, it also smells. Meeting an obstacle, the feeler is immediately withdrawn into the protection of the body, it becomes one with the whole until it timidly ventures forth again as an autonomous agent.

T. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

Emancipation presupposes the acquisition of experience. For people to attain this with self-assurance they require not the media but an autonomous public sphere they have themselves produced.

O. Negt and A. Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience*.

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Abstract

This thesis aims to reconstruct the work of Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, who productively integrate some political and aesthetic elements of the critical social theories of Adorno and Habermas to theorize the conditions for a radical social change.

I depart from Adorno's contention that a true historical change requires the construction of what he calls a 'global' subject—i.e. a collective of critical and autonomous individuals. Adorno, assuming that capitalism has virtually eliminated autonomous subjects, turns to art as a potential site from which this subject could (eventually) emanate. Given his limited understanding of art's emancipatory potential—dependent on *interpretation*—however, he can, at best, account for individual resistance, but not for the construction of a 'global subject'.

I then reconstruct Negt and Kluge's work as an attempt to move beyond Adorno's limitations. Capitalism, they contend, cannot be as pervasive as Adorno theorises, but rather always produces the possibility to resist—a subjective counter-reaction which through aesthetic means (including popular art) can be transformed into resistance and critical thinking. According to Negt and Kluge, the reappropriation of aesthetic forms, further, can enable the collective articulation of common interests and needs, and the resignification of imposed identities. This motivates the formation of counter-public spheres, i.e., oppositional social movements.

Counter-public spheres, nevertheless, are not sufficient to build a 'global' subject. This also requires the autonomous reconstitution of the public sphere *as a whole*, i.e. in the construction of what Negt and Kluge call a 'proletarian' public sphere. This alternative, I argue, must be understood as both as a consciousness-building *process* that mediates between particular interests and the totality of the social structures, and as the *result* of that process—a historically new social horizon of experience where individuals can consciously and collectively produce their contexts of living.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincerest gratitude toward Fabian Freyenhagen for supervising this project. His rigorous and meticulous supervision, as well as his ongoing support, have oriented me throughout the past four years. His knowledge of Adorno's work and his philosophical insights were invaluable for the development of my own thinking and for the completion of this thesis.

I took a leap in the dark when deciding to abandon mathematics and engage with philosophy, and the Philosophy department at the University of Essex proved to be the best place I could have landed. The vibrant atmosphere that surrounded me when I arrived at Essex was vital for the development of my thinking and of this research project. Thanks to all the faculty members and companions that allowed me to realize that I had made the right choice.

I also thank those members of the department who—either through discussions in the Critical Theory Colloquium, in the School Seminars, or on my supervisory panels—provided me with thorough feedback that helped me improve both my arguments and my writing. In particular, I want to name Peter Dews, Lorna Finlayson, Steve Gormley, Marie Guillot, Fiona Hughes, Timo Jütten, Wayne Martin, and Jörg Schaub. In one way or another, they all contributed to the writing of this thesis.

I also wish to thank Carlos Lingan, for introducing me to Adorno; Ana Varas, whose friendship was invaluable when I arrived to Essex; Cristobal Garibay Petersen and Tom Kugler for the long discussions over coffee; John Lumsden, for (unintentionally) pointing me toward Negt and Kluge; and Jakub Kowalewski, Josh Kennedy, and Maite Rodriguez Apólito, whose insights and company in West Quay made it the ideal place to develop this thesis.

My parents' and sisters' support was invaluable. Knowing that I could always count on them, and that they were always close whatever the distance, encouraged me to endure both the highs and the lows for the past five years.

Finally, I want reiterate my infinite gratitude to Maite Rodriguez Apólito, who filled this project with life and meaning.

Abbreviations

Books by Adorno:

AT *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, (London: Continuum, 2011

CIR 'Culture Industry Reconsidered,' in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, (London: Routledge, 2001).

DE with Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment. Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

ND *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (New York: Routledge, 2004).

Books by Negt and Kluge:

DuM II *Geschichte und Eigensinn*, vol. 2 of *Der unterschätzte Mensch: Gemeinsame Philosophie in zwei Bänden,* (Frankfurt: Zweitausendeins, 2001).

HO *History and Obstinacy*, trans. Richard Langston, et. al., (New York: Zone Books, 2014).

PSE *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*, trans. Peter Labanyi, et.al., (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1993).

Books by other authors:

RUE Albrecht Wellmer, 'Reason, Utopia, and the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*,' in *Habermas and Modernity*, ed. Richard Bernstein, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991).

STPS Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989).

TCA Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, vol. 1. Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).

TSR Albrecht Wellmer, 'Truth Semblance, and Reconciliation,' in *The Persistence of Modernity*, trans. David Midgley, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

Introduction: On Negt and Kluge's Critical Theory

Only if things might have gone differently; if the totality is recognized as a socially necessary semblance, as the hypostasis of the universal pressed out of individual human beings; if its claim to be absolute is broken—only then will a critical social consciousness retain its freedom to think that things might be different some day. Theory cannot shift the huge weight of historic necessity unless the necessity has been recognized as realized appearance and historic determination is known as a metaphysical accident.[1]

[Why] do we carry in us such a fixed conception of the probable order of events, which is only the sum of what is impressed upon us by the objective history or the media? Why do we hang on to it so energetically, while the imagination circles elsewhere […] and while the sum of improbabilities is just as great as the sum of all probabilities?[2]

In 1962, Alexander Kluge, still a young civil servant, wrote the short fictional story of Anita G., a restless middle-class woman whose thieving and frauds lead her down a bureaucratic rabbit-hole—which takes her to prison, to a psychic breakdown, and ultimately to her (and her child's) death.[3] This character was to become the main character of Kluge's first feature film, *Yesterday Girl* [*Abschied von Gestern]*, premiered on 1966—a film which won the Silver Lion at the Venice Film Festival and skyrocketed Kluge's career as a filmmaker. In one of the opening scenes of the film, Anita G. is caught stealing a co-worker's sweater. This apparently unnecessary theft takes her to court, where a baffled judge, unable to comprehend her motives, asks: "Why did you have to steal a sweater at this time of year?" To this, Anita G. responds: "I'm cold even in the summer."

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1 Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (New York: Routledge, 2004), 323. Cited hereafter parenthetically in text as ND followed by page number.

2 Alexander Kluge, in Claus Philipp 'Vertrauenswürdige Irrtümer: Ein Gespräch,' *Kolik*, 13 (2000): 10.

3 Jürgen Habermas, 'The Useful Mole that ruins the Beautiful Yard,' in *The Liberating Power of Symbols. Philosophical Essays*, trans. Peter Dews (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 116.

That "incomparable scene" was interpreted by Theodor Adorno—Kluge's friend and mentor—as speaking to the *question of coldness*, something that Adorno had written about and planned to expand on in a future essay that never materialized: 'That incomparable scene from *Yesterday Girl* where Lexi says, in response to the reproaches of the examining magistrate, "I'm cold even in the summer," has stayed with me. I'm deadly serious. This is what all of this is really about…'[4]

Coldness—the coldness of a world where rationalisation, disenchantment, and meaninglessness have left no space for self-realization or for happiness. A world all-too rational, but where rationality has been reduced to an empty shell, to a new form of illusion, and where people are neither the owners of their own experience, nor the guides of their own history. Adorno's critical theory can be read as an attempt to fight against such still-pervasive coldness (for him the "condition for disaster"). And for Adorno, as he wrote in 'Education after Auschwitz,' if anything can help in this fight, that is

> the insight into the conditions that determine [coldness] and the attempt to combat those conditions, initially in the domain of the individual . . . The first thing therefore is to bring coldness to the consciousness of itself, of the reasons why it arose.[5]

Adorno did not live to see the development of the career of Alexander Kluge—today one of the most important public intellectuals of Germany, as well as a renowned author, filmmaker, essayist,

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[4] This is documented in a letter from 1967 Adorno sent to Kluge, reproduced in Alexander Kluge, 'Straw in the Ice: Stories,' *Grey Room* 53, (Fall 2013): 89.

[5] Theodor Adorno, 'Education After Auschwitz,' in *Critical Models. Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry Pickford, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 202.

media lobbyist, founder of West Germany's first film school, and winner of countless prizes and awards for his outstanding work (including the Fontane prize, and, of course, the Adorno prize.)[6]

Kluge did not merely belong to the world of art, however, but also navigated the waters of Critical Theory. Along with Oskar Negt, he published *Public Sphere and Experience* (1972), a response to Habermas' book on the public sphere that tried to address the issues which emerged after the student movements of the late 1960s; and *History and Obstinacy* (1982), a book that delved into the nether reaches of history and of the body in order to find the potential to resist the logic of capitalism. Years later, they were to keep on working together, with Negt participating frequently in Kluge's television show *Ten to Eleven*. Eventually they published the collection of essays—mostly penned by Negt—*Maßverhältnisse des Politischen* (1992) (which can be roughly translated as 'Measured Relations of the Political').[7] Throughout those works, as in Kluge's aesthetic projects or Negt's more sociologically inclined writings, their aim has been grounding the possibility of subjective autonomy on a collective basis by building on people's experiences of alienation.[8]

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[6] For an overview of Kluge's career, see Peter Lutze, *Alexander Kluge: The Last Modernist*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998). For more biographical details, see Christopher Pavsek, *The Utopia of Film: Cinema and Its Futures in Godard, Kluge, and Tahimik*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); Miriam Hansen, 'Foreword,' to *Public Sphere and Experience* by Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1993) and 'Alexander Kluge: Crossings Between Film, Literature, Critical Theory', in *Film und Literatur: Literarische Texte und der neue deutsche Film*, ed. Susan Bauschinger, Susan L. Cocalis and Henry A. Lea (Bern: Francke, 1984); or Devin Fore, 'Introduction' to *History and Obstinacy* by Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt (New York: Zone Books, 2014).

[7] Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*, trans. Peter Labanyi, Jamie Owen Daniel, and Assenka Oksiloff (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1993), and Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *History and Obstinacy*, trans. Richard Langston, et. al. (New York: Zone Books, 2014). Negt and Kluge's *Public Sphere and Experience* and *History and Obstinacy* are hereafter cited parenthetically in text as PSE and HO respectively, followed by page number.

[8] While there is no consensus on whether Kluge's aesthetic projects work independently from Negt and Kluge's theoretical works, it will become clear throughout this thesis that there are enough intersections to read them as part

The names Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, however, have not received nearly the same attention that other thinkers associated with the Frankfurt School have—one thinks of Jürgen Habermas, Axel Honneth, or Albrecht Wellmer, for example. Throughout this thesis, part of my aim is to show that their philosophy has much to contribute to the project of the Frankfurt School—a critical project that, if it is to remain critical, must be bound to the practical goals of achieving equality and justice, but also the sensual and rational fulfilment of humanity.

Yet, it would be hard to contend that Negt and Kluge's relative obscurity is merely accidental. For one, for many years, mainstream critical theory had forgotten about the political relevance of art and the aesthetic, something that did not play well for their 'aesthetically' inclined work.[9] Furthermore, the way Negt and Kluge philosophize is anything but straightforward, making it hard to navigate or to locate within the cannon of the Frankfurt School—or to even read their work as 'Critical Theory.'[10] They draw from such a variegated array of materials, mediums, and sources, that the readers of their work might find themselves puzzled, if not overwhelmed; and their style makes one work through associations more than logical connections, through aesthetic 'shocks' rather than argumentative structures.[11] Their work is discontinuous, fragmented, resembling more a piece of avant-garde music,

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of a whole collective project. Similarly, the few essays by Negt that have been translated into English show that he shares the concern with individual autonomy and with the constitution of a collective subject. In this sense, further, both Negt and Kluge are clearly inheritors to the spirit of the Frankfurt School.

[9] See Nikolas Kompridis, ed., *The Aesthetic Turn in Political Thought*, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014) for an account of the recent return to the aesthetic as a source of political energy. Closer to the 'inner circle' of the Frankfurt School, the work of Albrecht Wellmer is an exception. See, e.g., the essays in Albrecht Wellmer, *The Persistence of Modernity*, trans. David Midgley, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

[10] I capitalize the term when explicitly referring to the project of the Frankfurt School. If it appears without capitalization, this is to refer instead to the 'spirit' of critique which forms part of that school, but now broadly transcends its boundaries.

[11] This is something Negt and Kluge's theory shares with Kluge's own aesthetic project, along with what Andreas

a film by Godard, or the work of Benjamin, than a classic philosophical book, as Fredric Jameson notes.[12] The seemingly unrelated chapters, scattered with commentaries (on, e.g., Marx's diaries or on Greek myths), fairy tales, captioned images, to name some of their go-to devices, are all prone to push away a reader looking for a more traditional philosophical approach.

That Negt and Kluge's work has been overlooked, however, is not mainly due to the difficulty or the puzzlement one encounters when attempting to immerse oneself in it, but, as I see it, has much more to do with a misunderstanding of the reasons why their theory—and their work ultimately *is* theory—is presented in such a way. Negt and Kluge are committed to a style of philosophizing that is neither prescriptive nor indoctrinating, but rather trusts in people's capacities, even when acknowledging that these might need orientation. For Negt and Kluge, this approach is the only way in which a true rationality—and, thus, a truly historical emancipatory movement—can emerge.[13] According to them, people must have the power "to use their own understanding," but as Kluge writes:

> This courage can be expanded to include the courage to use not only the powers of reason

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Huyssen describes as a concern with a "new kind of enlightenment, one that has worked through the catastrophic failures of its own tradition and that is concerned not only with the fate of human rationality, but also with the historical determinations of the senses, perceptions and emotions." See Andreas Huyssen, 'An Analytic Storyteller in the Course of Time,' in *Alexander Kluge. Raw Materials for the Imagination*, ed. Tara Forrest (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 274.

[12] Frederic Jameson, 'On Negt and Kluge,' *October* 46, (Fall 1988): 152-153. The case of *Public Sphere and Experience*, their first collaborative work, although still textually interesting, is more 'traditional.' As Jameson notes, here the long footnotes, that seem to act as the subconscious of the book, the excursus and the commentaries, resemble Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, but it still preserves, despite the theoretical difficulty, what could be called a respect for academic forms.

[13] In this vein, Negt and Kluge refer to the 'tender germ' mentioned in Kant's essay on enlightenment. See HO, 379-380.

> but also the powers of feeling (*Gemüt*), the powers of the senses, [which are] the common ground of all "human essential powers."[14]

Navigating through Negt and Kluge's radically anti-authoritarian approach (which explicitly rejects easy comprehension) implies engaging with works that motivate not only our rational capacitates, but also our imagination (they usually speak of our fantasy) and our senses. Because of this, however, reading their work *as* critical theory proves to be a difficult task.

Yet, contrary to those who, like Habermas, once saw in books like *History and Obstinacy* "a beautiful, surrealist, you could even say somehow postmodern construction,"[15] or who considered that Negt and Kluge's aesthetic and theoretical projects had departed from the concerns with emancipation and rationality of modernity,[16] therefore dismissing or overlooking the critical relevance of their work, I take their collaborative oeuvre as a serious critical contribution.[17] As I show throughout this thesis, Negt and Kluge's work can actually be read as a continuation of the project of the Frankfurt School's critical theory, especially as developed by Adorno. Nevertheless, doing so requires taking into account the critiques deployed against the totalizing power of reason, as well as the contributions to a democratic theory of the public sphere provided by Habermas (which Adorno's theory lacked). It also requires taking the role of sense perception, of fantasy and the imagination, as seriously as Adorno

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[14] Alexander Kluge, 'The Poetic Power of Theory,' *New German Critique* 139, Vol. 47, No. 1, (February 2020): 18: "the most important thing about the obstinacy of these obstinate powers is that they rely on self-organization."

[15] Oskar Negt interviewed by Rainer Stollmann and Christian Schulte, 'Moles Don't Use Systems: A Conversation with Oskar Negt,' *October* 149, (Summer 2014): 70.

[16] See, e.g., Stuart Liebman and Alexander Kluge, 'On New German Cinema, Art, Enlightenment, and the Public Sphere: An Interview With Alexander Kluge,' *October* 46, (Fall 1988): 57-58.

[17] In this vein, e.g., Lutze rightly speaks of Kluge as the 'last modernist' in order to highlight his obstinate reliance on the 'utopia' of rationality and his suspicion of "institutionalized and affirmative" manifestations of rationality. See Lutze, *Alexander Kluge*, 30-32.

did.[18] Finally, it requires paying close attention to the centrality of intersubjective interaction and communication, highlighted in the works of Habermas and Wellmer.

The main aim of this thesis, therefore, is to provide a reconstruction of Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge's collaborative work, and to position them as inheritors of the critical project of the Frankfurt School, in particular that of Adorno. What motivates this reconstruction is the conviction that if one properly puts the pieces together, Negt and Kluge's work provides elements to show that there need not be a chasm between the aesthetic and the 'rational'—between sensual fulfilment and critical self-reflection. But it also shows that theory can and should be concerned with *present* forms of praxis and with the political manifestations of social movements, without losing its critical impulse. This work aims to reconstruct this overlooked alternative within Critical Theory, and to present it as one that still aims at locating—within an oppressive social totality—both the seeds of autonomy, and the possibility to produce a qualitatively new horizon of experience collectively *and* rationally. The turn to Negt and Kluge is timely—both because the current social conditions call for a more radical approach to critique, and because such approach has not been taken by the more widely known heirs of the Frankfurt School (notably Habermas and Honneth) after Adorno.

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[18] Adorno highlights the importance of fantasy, e.g., in *Minima Moralia*, where he writes on its relation to judgment: "should fantasy be driven out, judgement too, the real act of knowledge, is exorcised." Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, (London: Verso, 2005), 122-123. In Chapter III section I.3 below, I discuss the use of the concept of 'fantasy' (and its relation to the 'imagination') in Negt and Kluge's work. The term Negt and Kluge use most often is that of '*Phantasie*,' which can be translated diversely as 'fantasy,' 'imagination,' as 'fancy,' or sometimes even as 'phantasy.' I mostly use the term 'fantasy' here since (i) it preserves the association with 'escape' or 'caprice.' Despite the negative connotations of these, for Negt and Kluge there is a moment of truth (of critique) even when fantasy behaves capriciously (or rather obstinately). Furthermore, (ii) the term is preferred to 'imagination' since the latter is most closely associated with Kant. As I argue below, while Negt and Kluge retain something of the Kantian understanding (as a capacity that synthesizes and furthers knowledge) explicit references to Kant's '*Einbildungskraft*' are seldom made in their work.

Before continuing, I want to say something about my reconstruction of Negt and Kluge's work, since the continuity between the two major works on which I focus, and between these and Kluge's own work is not necessarily obvious.[19] While the continuity between *Public Sphere* and *History and Obstinacy* has not always been accounted for, I believe it is safe to say that the later book was the product of Negt and Kluge's need to ground theoretically the more 'politically' inclined arguments presented in their first collaboration. There, they close by an appeal to the 'proletarian' capacities which, invisible to the subject, are nevertheless "aggregated into a subjective capacity for action." (PSE, 297) These capacities thus appeared as the basis for the construction of the public sphere, but were not sufficiently accounted for. That work was completed ten years later in *History and Obstinacy,* with its close study of the now-called 'labour' capacities. It seems to me undoubtable, therefore, that there is a strong continuity within these two works.

That I have decided to add to this mix the practical works and aesthetic theory of Kluge might not appear so immediately clear (even if it should become clear throughout this work), so I want to briefly justify this decision.[20] His debt to Critical Theory and to Adorno in particular *can* be sensed throughout the style, form, and through the scattered remarks within Kluge's aesthetic practice—and this points to a common ground between his theoretical and aesthetic work.[21] More importantly, as it

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[19] I will not touch much on Negt's individual work, but only use it when it is clear that Negt is presenting or clarifying ideas that form part of the material of his collective work with Kluge. I do believe that Negt's sociological oeuvre, however, could be explored productively both independently (especially his account of children and adult education which only slightly pops-up in his works with Kluge) and as part of this more encompassing critical project.

[20] Kluge himself, for example, says that his filmmaking and his (critical) theory "have nothing to do with each other." Kluge and Liebman, 'On New German Cinema, Art, Enlightenment, and the Public Sphere,' 48.

[21] Perhaps a transparent example is found in his collection *The Devil's Blindspot. Tales from the New Century*, trans. Martin Chalmers and Michael Husle, (New York: New Directions Books, 2004), viii, where Kluge explicitly mentions the philosophers of the Frankfurt School as his mentors.

will become clear throughout the thesis, Kluge's aesthetic works and aesthetic theory are also presupposing those protest energies theorized with Negt; and furthermore, they are (sometimes more explicitly than others) presented by Kluge as interventions toward the transformation of the public sphere into a 'proletarian' public sphere.[22]

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My reconstruction of Negt and Kluge's work calls for a return to the philosophical endeavour that was outlined by Adorno, while attempting to avoid falling into the impasses that Adorno's work encountered. To do this while salvaging many of the elements of Adorno's work, however, it is necessary to solve a dilemma that is present within the critical theory of Adorno and toward whose solution, as I argue in this work, Negt and Kluge can contribute.

The aforementioned dilemma concerns, on the one hand, Adorno's awareness that a radical social change was both possible and necessary, and what is more, his consideration that only what he called a 'global' subject—i.e. an association of free individuals which could preserve their particularity while acting collectively, self-reflectively, and autonomously—could bring about this change.[23] For Adorno, this required the fulfilment of an emphatic notion of rationality: one that encompassed an 'aesthetic' demand for sensual fulfilment and self-realization, and a moment of self-reflection and critique. On the other hand, however, because of the way Adorno understood the conditions of modern capitalist societies, he was unable to conceive of an actually existing political or social movement from which social change could come about rationally. "At this time no higher form of

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[22] Actually, a recent commentator has made the interesting claim that Kluge's multi-mediatic works are but different vessels through which Kluge presents the same ideas and concepts See Philipp Ekardt, *Toward Fewer Images: The Work of Alexander Kluge*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2018), xviii.

[23] Adorno, 'Progress,' in *Critical Models*, 144. See section I of this Introduction below.

society is concretely visible: for that reason whatever acts as though it were in easy reach has something regressive about it," Adorno writes.[24] Since, according to him, there was no rational and collective subject in view that could realize the utopia of a full rationality, Adorno was unable to ground the practical possibility of constituting this higher form of society. In the meantime, Adorno contended, theory and art were to act as the guarantors "of freedom in the midst of unfreedom."[25]

With Adorno, I take it that critical theory needs to focus on theorizing the conditions that could bring about such a radical change, and that to do this, the aesthetic element (so central to his critical thought) needs to be salvaged. However, one of my guiding contentions is that there is a need to incorporate the political and collective dimensions that Adorno was unable to account for, without thereby losing the focus on particularity and individual autonomy. Theoretical solidarity needs to go beyond itself and look for the material forces that could bring about a rational form of praxis. Given the path taken by Critical Theory after Adorno—largely determined by Habermas' paradigm shift to a philosophy of intersubjective communication—it would seem, however, that to do this, a choice needs to be made between either salvaging Adorno's concern with the particular and the demand for individual 'self-realization'—and thus the preservation of the aesthetic moment of rationality—or salvaging the demand for justice and equality.[26] With Adorno, I also take it that we should not have to make a choice; and that no social change can be called truly 'historical' or 'rational' without taking into account the import of particularity, and without ending the repression of the particular by the

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[24] Adorno, 'Resignation,' in *Critical Models,* 292.

[25] Adorno, 'Marginalia to Theory and Praxis,' in *Critical Models*, 263.

[26] This shows up, e.g., in Habermas' 'discourse ethics,' where there is an underlying separation between the good life and justice. For criticisms of this position, see e.g. Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990) and *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); or Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self. Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

universal.[27] The work of Negt and Kluge, I argue, can take us a step closer to the realization of such goals.

In this Introduction, I anticipate the detailed motivation of this thesis for both building on and going beyond Adorno, and then introduce Negt and Kluge's work. I situate the latter within the tradition of the Frankfurt School, and outline the way it brings to the fore the often overlooked relation between the aesthetic, critical, and political elements of theory. The Introduction is structured as follows: first, I consider Adorno's theory and outline its impasses. To do this, I focus on (i) his emphatic notion of rationality as a synthesis between the aesthetic and the logical-conceptual, and (ii) his notion of a 'global' subject (section I). I then turn to Negt and Kluge's work and provide a brief overview of the argument reconstructed throughout this thesis, while anticipating and introducing some of Negt and Kluge's key concepts (section II). Negt and Kluge's work, I contend, is best understood as an attempt to synthesise elements of Adorno's theory with its missing political dimensions—which Negt and Kluge bring to the table via a critique of Habermas' category of the 'public sphere.'

I) Adorno: Reason, the Aesthetic, and the Construction of a 'Global Subject'

As Shierry Weber and Martin Jay have noted, there is a tension between two impulses that runs across the tradition of the Frankfurt School: on the one hand, an aesthetic impulse that demands a fully-lived experience and the possibility of happiness, and on the other, a rational impulse that highlights "self-

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[27] Adorno, 'Marginalia to Theory and Praxis,' 264. See also Espen Hammer, *Adorno and the Political*, (London: Routledge, 2006), 157-158, where the distinction drawn by Habermas between justice and the good life (between morality and ethics) is questioned from an Adornian standpoint.

reflection as a critical tool."[28] In Adorno's work, this tension is expressed as a gradual split between cognition through concepts, and the sensual, bodily forms of perception. What drives the split, Adorno contends, is an instrumental logic of self-preservation that forces the repression of the inner nature of the human being—with its drives for pleasure, its desires, its mimetic forms of behaviour.[29] According to him, only if we, as a society, restore the legitimacy of the latter, would it be possible to speak emphatically of civilization as a rational process, and of an 'enlightenment' in the true sense of the word.

This would have to be done, however, without bypassing reason—the source of repression but also of critical and autonomous thought—but by going *through* reason. Adorno characterizes this process, thus, as a self-transcendence of reason whereby conceptual reason is brought together with its aesthetic or mimetic counterpart, contained in forms of behaviour and relationships that are non-controlling, expressive, sensual. (ND, 14-15)[30] Notably, he writes: "To represent the mimesis it supplanted, the concept has no other way than to adopt something mimetic in its own conduct, without abandoning itself." (ND, 14)

Adorno's emphatic concept of reason, on which the possibility of a truly rational organization of society depends, is one where the conceptual and logical forms of reason are reconciled with the

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[28] Martin Jay, 'Habermas and Modernism,' in *Habermas and Modernity*, ed. Richard Bernstein, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 125.

[29] In this vein Susan Buck-Morss recalls that the word 'aesthetic' used to refer to 'perception by feeling,' and is related to a form of cognition achieved through the corporeal sensorium. Susan Buck-Morss, 'Aesthetics and Anesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered,' *October* 62, (Autumn, 1992): 6. Adorno thus speaks of a separation between mind and body, and of the need for the former to remember its physical aspect. (See e.g. ND, 203).

[30] Wellmer speaks of "sensually receptive, expressive and communicative" forms of behaviour. See Albrecht Wellmer, 'Truth Semblance, and Reconciliation,' in *The Persistence of Modernity*, trans. David Midgley, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 4. Cited hereafter in text as TSR, followed by page number. See also Chapter IV below.

sensual and aesthetic; and were justice, equality, and the lack of material scarcity is reconciled with the self-fulfilment of individuals. (ND, 202-203)[31] Conversely, the 'aesthetic' (broadly understood)—usually considered 'irrational,' impulsive—is, in his emphatic understanding, not divorced from critique or reflection.[32] As I argue in Chapter I, this is why Adorno speaks of an aporetic relation between art and philosophy, which could be transcended only if a state of reconciliation were to be reached. That Adorno wants to hold on to both the aesthetic and the conceptual shows, for example, in the fact that despite his emphasis on non-identity, on the somatic, and on the aesthetic, for Adorno the task of critical theory was neither to liberate 'desire' or let 'irrationality' roam free, nor to become itself aesthetic.[33]

Crucially, for Adorno, the establishment of such emphatic form of reason would require the constitution of a higher form of society. Adorno does not say much about what this society would be like, but what is certain is that (i) it would *not* be a society determined by an organization of production that reproduces itself automatically and without regard for human beings; and that (ii) *neither* would it be a society where, for the sake of self-preservation, individuals endure the repression of their inner

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[31] Note that while the conceptual or logical is usually associated with rationality writ large, for Adorno this is but a moment of reason that by itself is incomplete and has even turned irrational. See, e.g., Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment. Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002): 1-2. Cited hereafter in text as DE followed by page number.

[32] Hence why Adorno, for example, speaks of art as a form of cognition—even a language—that however does not make judgements: "Artworks are, as synthesis, analogous to judgment; in artworks, however, synthesis does not result in judgment; of no artwork is it possible to determine its judgment or what its so-called message is." Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, (London: Continuum, 2011): 163. Cited hereafter in text as AT followed by page number.

[33] As Peter Dews writes, for Adorno "a liberation of 'desire' from all constraining identity would cease to be a liberation at all, since there would no longer be a self to enjoy the lifting of the barriers." Peter Dews, 'Power and Subjectivity in Foucault,' *New Left Review* I/144, (March-April 1984): 95.

nature.[34] According to Adorno, in our present capitalist society the particular "has come to be a function of the universal," and further, "[a] true preponderance of the particular would not be attainable except by changing the universal." (ND, 313) A truly reconciled society would be one where the universal and the particular are, instead, mediated in the form of what could be called an 'expressive' whole.[35] What this means is that—in contrast to a notion of totality as captured in, e.g., Lukacs' notion of the proletariat as the 'Subject-Object' of history—society should be constituted through an association of free human beings where all are in the same conditions for the realization of their capacities.[36] It also means that a rational social organization is one where individuals could preserve their individuality, express their interests and needs, and relate to one another and to the world in a non-instrumental manner, achieving a non-violent synthesis of particulars.[37]

Adorno's idea of a reconciled society thus contains a different notion of what a 'collective subject' should be: one where particularity and universality are not at odds, and where the ideas of justice and equality come together with individual happiness. Adorno refers to this collective subject in his essay on 'Progress,' where he contends that if a historical social change is to take place, this will only be possible after "a self-conscious global subject [develops and intervenes]."[38] Referring approvingly to Kant's doctrine of progress, which was anchored on the notion of a 'human being,'

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[34] See e.g. Fabian Freyenhagen, 'Adorno's Critique of Late Capitalism,' in *Conceptions of Critique in Modern and Contemporary Philosophy*, ed. Karin de Boer and Ruth Sonderegger (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 180.

[35] See, e.g., Chapter 8 of Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality. The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

[36] See Georg Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness. Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), especially part III: 'The Standpoint of the Proletariat,' section 6, 197.

[37] See also Max Horkheimer, 'Traditional and Critical Theory,' in *Critical Theory. Selected Essays*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell, et. al., (New York: Continuum, 2002), 219.

[38] Adorno, 'Progress,' 144.

Adorno gives some further clues on what this *self-conscious* and *global* subject might look like. The purpose of developing all of humanity's capacities (a goal Adorno's theory shares), Kant states,

> can be fulfilled only in a society which has not only the greatest freedom, and therefore a continual antagonism among its members, but also the most precise specification and preservation of the limits of this freedom in order that it can coexist with the freedom of others.[39]

In line with his defence of particularity and with the idea of happiness, Adorno's 'global subject' would not only be self-conscious and embrace all humanity. It would also have to preserve individual freedom (individuals would thus have to be able to develop and satisfy their own needs and interests) up to the extent that collective coexistence was threatened. Adorno, however, never managed to justify how such a global subject—and thus the aforementioned 'higher' form of society—could become a reality.

The reasons for this failure are discussed in Chapter I below. To anticipate, the core of the problem is located in the way Adorno ties together reason to reification, and consequently, in his conceptualization of modern societies as totally organized by instrumental reason. According to him, the rationalization/reification process has virtually extinguished the autonomous subjects that could orient a rational social change. What was once known as life, he contends, "has become the sphere of private existence and now of mere consumption, dragged along as an appendage to the process of material production, without autonomy or substance of its own."[40] For Adorno, further, the current forms of social organization—including the way production was organized—"hinders [freedom, equality, and emancipation] and produces and reproduces a condition of permanent regression among

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[39] Kant, cited by Adorno, 'Progress,' 144.

[40] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 15.

its subjects."[41] Under such conditions, what we traditionally know as 'politics' (i.e. institutionalized politics such as the official governmental system) and rational forms of praxis,[42] Adorno claims, are foreclosed for the foreseeable future. Also foreclosed, therefore, is the constitution of a global subject.[43] Lacking critical and autonomous individuals, critical theory (and critical forms of art) had to focus on a 'pre-political,' 'pre-revolutionary' task: the cultivation of critique and autonomy by "wordlessly asserting what is barred to politics."[44] For Adorno, this, too, was the 'political' or emancipatory role of (autonomous) art.

As we will see, Adorno focused on the emancipatory role of autonomous art and philosophy as part of his attempt to salvage the possibility for a real political organization, and by extension for a true historical social change.[45] That this task fell to spheres such as autonomous art was due to their autonomy—which allowed them (to some extent) to escape the grasp of instrumental reason and commodification, and in so doing to criticise society. But the preservation of this critical moment is paid by its incommunicability and hermetism. Understanding it, therefore, demands philosophical interpretation. The problem with this move, as I discuss in detail in Chapters I and IV of this thesis,

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41 Adorno, 'Opinion Delusion Society,' in *Critical Models*, 119.

42 As compared to what he calls pseudo-activity, i.e. "praxis that takes itself more seriously and insulates itself more diligently from theory and knowledge the more it loses con- tact with its object and a sense of proportion." Adorno, 'Marginalia to Theory and Praxis,' 269-270.

43 Theodor Adorno, 'Commitment,' *New Left Review* I/87-88, (September-December 1974): 89. See also Fabian Freyenhagen, 'Adorno's Politics: Theory and praxis in Germany's 1960s,' *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, Vol. 40/9, (2014): 3-5.

44 Adorno, 'Commitment,' 89.

45 As Freyenhagen notes, this does not imply that Adorno considered that there were no other paths to take to further autonomous individuals and thus the possibility of an eventual genuine democracy. His constant contributions as a public figure after his return to West Germany in the 1960s (some collected in *Critical Models*) attest to this. See for example Freyenhagen, 'Adorno's Politics.'

is not that Adorno 'turned away' from politics, or that he gave up on the possible realization of the goal formulated by Critical Theory.[46] Rather, the problem is that if Adorno's account of the emancipatory power of art is to work, then these artworks would have to intervene in a social (and currently reified) consciousness, *triggering* autonomous thought. But because of the way Adorno construes aesthetic truth, for this intervention to happen artworks demand interpretation, and consequently require certain skills and knowledge whose development and exercise—according to Adorno's understanding—capitalism pre-empts.

Aesthetic truth becomes decipherable only by those few individuals *already* lucky enough to have the intellectual capacities and the knowledge to 'comprehend' them. (ND, 41) Therefore, rather than cultivating the conditions for autonomous thinking, it turns out that art—as theorized by Adorno—demands already-autonomous thinkers. Adorno's account leads to the conclusion that in capitalism, emancipatory art has *no structurally significant addressee*.[47] But if this is the case, then the possibility to build a global subject remains foreclosed, and the 'emancipatory' power of art empty.

Regardless of Adorno's failure to justify the possibility of a future collective action, I take his work, and centrally, his imperative for the need to foster autonomy and critique in order to achieve a true rational society, as grounds from which theoretical critique must build upon. Throughout this

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[46] According to critics like Helmut Dubiel, the way Adorno postulates critique as purely theoretical becomes self-referential. Helmut Dubiel, *Theory and Politics. Studies in the Development of Critical Theory*, trans. Benjamin Craigg, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), 86. Adorno's polemics with Lukacs or the critique of his student Hans-Jürgen Krahl exemplify this type of critique. See also, e.g., Robert Lanning, *In the Hotel Abyss. An Hegelian-Marxist Critique of Adorno*, (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

[47] See Lambert Zuidervaart, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory. The Redemption of Illusion*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991): 141. See also Rüdiger Bubner, 'Concerning the Central Idea of Adorno's Philosophy,' in *The Semblance of Authenticity*, ed. Tom Huhn and Lambert Zuidervaart, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999); and Albrecht Wellmer, 'Truth Semblance and Reconciliation.' I discuss these criticisms thoroughly in Chapters I and IV below.

thesis, I also take Adorno's emphatic concept of reason, as well as his notion of a 'global' subject, to be necessary building blocks for a critical theory which "has for its object [human beings] as producers of their own historical way of life in its totality,"[48] and whose goal is the emancipation from an externally organized life process under which humans, through their own labour, are enslaved.[49]

II) Negt and Kluge: the Obstinacy of Thought and the Construction of the Public Sphere

The work of Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge builds upon the early project of the Frankfurt School. As I show throughout this thesis, it is particularly indebted to the philosophy of Adorno, with whom Negt and Kluge share the contention that a true rationality will only be possible if the 'aesthetic' impulses repressed within the subject are recovered, but that this has to happen by going *through* reason and self-reflection. Negt and Kluge's work also follows Adorno's imperative for the need to construct a 'global subject' in order to have a historical social change. However, their works are separated from Adorno's by what Habermas once called (in reference to Kluge) a "worldly pragmatism, a feeling for the achievement of small-scale successes."[50]

This pragmatism is rooted in the deep conviction—that grounds all of Negt and Kluge's work, and which would be completely foreign to Adorno—that neither human communities nor subjectivity can be vanquished or eliminated, something that creates a breathing space for theory.[51] If Negt and

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[48] Horkheimer, 'Postscript,' in *Critical Theory*, 244.

[49] See Horkheimer, 'Traditional and Critical Theory,' in *Critical Theory*, 212-213.

[50] Habermas, 'The Useful Mole,' 113.

[51] See Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, 'Introduction: On New Public Spheres,' in *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*, 2nd edition, trans. Peter Labanyi, et.al., (London: Verso, 2016), eBook. See also PSE, 186.

Kluge share some of Adorno's convictions, then, they have also attempted to transform the negativity underlying his thinking into an "emancipatory positivity," as they call it.[52] Their aim is to show that the possibility of a radical social change is not a utopian one, but is actually practically realizable. Achieving it requires changing our fixed conceptions about the nature of reality, and realizing that we can all be the producers of our own history. The role they assign to art and theory for achieving this change will also be shown to go beyond Adorno's narrow perspective.

In order to transcend Adorno's negativity, Negt and Kluge present a construal of modern subjectivity, reconstructed in Chapter II, intended to undo the entwinement of subjectification and reification. What Negt and Kluge propose is to study the subject of capitalism not as a substantive whole, but as constituted of various 'labour capacities,' i.e. the (natural and historical) properties that individuals require to perform acts of intellectual and creative labour, and through which they produce both objects and, crucially, themselves. Those capacities that constitute the organic base of the subject, Negt and Kluge contend—in what can be seen as a reinterpretation of Adorno's account of the drive toward self-preservation—follow laws of 'self-regulation.'[53] What this means, briefly, is that there is a tendency within the material structures of human beings toward the preservation of their "own dynamics . . . [their] own, very different means-to-an-end relations."[54] Hence why Negt and Kluge can also speak of a material resistance against variation upon which later needs and interests are historically

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[52] See Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Geschichte und Eigensinn*, vol. 2 of *Der unterschätzte Mensch: Gemeinsame Philosophie in zwei Bänden* (Frankfurt: Zweitausendeins, 2001): 487. Cited hereafter in text as DuM II followed by page number.

[53] Rudolph Burger, 'Die Mikrophysik des Widerstandes,' *Ästhetik und Kommunikation* 48 (June 1982): 118. Self-regulating capacities are those capacities grounded in the experiences and material processes that are presupposed by capitalism but that, for such reason, cannot be completely instrumentalized.

[54] Eberhard Knödler-Bunte, in 'The History of Living Labor Power: A Discussion with Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge,' *October* 149, (Summer 2014): 55. See also HO, 99.

constructed.[55] This is also what allows them to contend that, within human subjects, there are forces and energies "allergic to any form of heteronomy."[56]

By contending that there is a law of self-regulation embedded in certain subjective capacities and material properties—a contention which is grounded in sources such as psychoanalysis, but that also relies on the work of the early Marx[57]—allows Negt and Kluge to postulate the existence of a limit (what they call a "block of real life") to the extent to which the human subject can be valorized or forced to function following, e.g., merely instrumental patterns.[58] According to them, the appropriation of human properties (which here refers to intellectual capacities as well as to the material conditions which provide humans with stability or balance, with a sense of belonging) by the logic of capitalism ruptures the inner balance economy of the subject. This, because according to their account, the instrumental, means-ends logic of capitalism, as Devin Fore writes, "does not observe any inherent limits or proportions [but] accumulates exponentially,"[59] something that contrasts with the self-regulating processes of the subject. The capitalist process of separation or accumulation (as Negt and Kluge diversely call it) finds its limit in the self-regulating laws of material processes, which cannot be altered at will—not even by the subject itself. (HO, 99-100) Not, that is, without producing a counter-

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[55] In this vein, they approach the way Adorno construes the relation between 'higher' and 'lower' faculties. See, e.g., Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 122: "even [thought's] remotest objectifications are nourished by impulses."

[56] Negt and Kluge, 'Introduction: On New Public Spheres,' in *Public Sphere and Experience*.

[57] While commentators have focused on Negt and Kluge's approaches to cognitive sciences and biology, I take it that those serve more as illustrations of their philosophical points. See Richard Langston, *Dark Matter. A Guide to Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt*, (London: Verso, 2020), 74. As I discuss in the body of this work, Negt and Kluge's theory does have some naturalist connotations which are discussed below.

[58] See, e.g., HO, 99-100; PSE, 57-58.

[59] Fore, 'Introduction,' 23.

reaction, which Negt and Kluge call 'obstinacy,' or *Eigensinn*, a term that alludes to 'autonomy' or to 'self-will,' to a "willful meaning," to use Frederic Jameson's definition.[60]

The term *Eigensinn*—translated as 'obstinacy'—is thereby intended to denote an immanent impulse that pursues its own path, but which often does so arbitrarily and stubbornly.[61] Obstinacy is the subject's response to every imposition of the logic of capitalism, a counter-action to every attempt at reification that is aimed at (re)establishing balance within the subject: "The labourer," as Fore writes, "meets every abstract operation with a corresponding feat of concretion, every act of violent coercion with one of intransigent willfulness."[62] By changing the central drive of self-preservation to one of self-regulation, that is, Negt and Kluge's intention is to ground the persistence of a potential for resistance against subsumption. The subject, they insist, cannot be fully reduced by the interests of capital or by the process of commodification. Contrary to what Adorno (in his most dire moments) contended, Negt and Kluge insist that societies cannot be totally organized following a logic, such as capitalism's, that functions automatically and without regard for human needs. (HO, 85)

However, the persistence of this obstinate potential does not in any straightforward sense guarantee emancipation. (PSE, 58) And Negt and Kluge are aware of this: while obstinacy is persistent and cannot be uprooted, it *can* be temporarily manipulated or contained (even helping in the reproduction of capitalism) or it can separate itself from reality, leading to "deadly outcomes."[63] As a subjective and material impulse, obstinacy lacks any sense of measure or any political orientation, and

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[60] Jameson, 'On Negt and Kluge,' 158.

[61] Jameson, 'On Negt and Kluge,' 158, and Andrew Bowie, review of *Geschichte und Eigensinn* by Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Telos* 66, (December 1985): 183.

[62] Fore, 'Introduction,' 24.

[63] The reference is to Kluge's short science fiction novella, *Learning Processes with a Deadly Outcome*, trans. Christopher Pavsek, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

hence requires the complement of self-reflection and consciousness in order to guide the subject toward autonomy. How to elicit the sublation of what we could call (with Adorno) a 'somatic impulse' into forms of autonomous thought, and eventually of emancipatory political organization, becomes a political question (one where, centrally, the aesthetic will have an important role to play) and is the subject of the subsequent Chapters (III-VI).[64]

The second aspect of Negt and Kluge's work thus concerns finding ways in which this protest energy can be adequately oriented, so that the subjects can use this energy in the production of autonomous, critical thinking. This is no easy task, however, since it requires reclaiming people's obstinacy (which, as we will see in Chapter III, Negt and Kluge locate in peoples' fantasies and wishes) while permitting individuals to self-organize their *own* experiences and contexts of living according to their self-defined interests and needs.[65] For Negt and Kluge, the site where this can happen is the public sphere, which they understand as the social horizon whereby experience is constituted. It is in the public sphere, that is, where experience—i.e. the individual and collective capacities "of seeing connections and relations, of juggling reality and fantasy, of remembering the past and imagining a different future,"[66]—is either crippled (as is in the current one) or enabled.

The centrality of the role of the public sphere as well as that of art and culture in its (re)constitution first comes together in Negt and Kluge's account of the 'consciousness industry,'

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[64] As Kluge writes, the practical side—i.e. transforming that energy into autonomy, into self-consciousness, making it a viable for political organization—is a much more difficult task than asserting the 'autonomy' of obstinacy. Florian Hopf, "'Feelings Can Move Mountains ...': An Interview with Alexander Kluge on the Film *The Power of Feelings,*" in *Alexander Kluge. Raw Materials*, 243. As mentioned above, Negt and Kluge do not simply believe in something like a postmodern 'liberation of desire,' nor on the liberating power of spontaneity, as we will see throughout this work.

[65] See Richard Langston, 'Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge,' in volume 1 of *The SAGE Handbook of Frankfurt School Critical Theory*, ed. Beverley Best, et. al., (London: SAGE, 2018): 323. See also, e.g., PSE, 177; 185-186.

[66] Hansen, 'Foreword,' xvii-xviii. See also Jameson, 'On Negt and Kluge,' 156-157.

which, I argue in Chapter III, can be read as their critique and response to Adorno and Horkheimer's seminal work on the culture industry. There, to recall, the culture industry referred to the system (made up from film, radio, TV, magazines) that had become all-encompassing and which impressed everything with the same stamp. "Culture today is infecting everything with sameness," Adorno and Horkheimer write. (DE, 94) Culture, now commodified and mass produced, had become almost exclusively affirmative, and its sole goal had become to reproduce its audience as consumers. This thesis was so influential that even Habermas' study on the *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (of central influence for Negt and Kluge's work on the public sphere and which in many other respects departed from Adorno's 'pessimist' thinking), still held on to Adorno's conclusions: Mass culture was, for Adorno as for Habermas, manipulated culture, a culture with a low psychological 'entry requirement.'[67]

Negt and Kluge's analysis does not—at first instance—differ substantially from those of their predecessors. Negt and Kluge are also aware of the power that the culture industry has, and of the ideological and economic role it plays for the reproduction of capitalism. But given their analysis of the constitution of the subject, they cannot agree with Adorno's and Habermas' claim that the masses have become the objects of a commodified culture. This claim had led Adorno toward a defence of autonomous culture—which retained a moment of protest but was accessible but to a lucky few—and Habermas toward an attempt to salvage the political culture and the public sphere of the raising

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[67] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989): 166-167. Cited hereafter in text as STPS followed by page number. Habermas actually refers to Adorno's study on the 'Fetish Character in Music,' where Adorno, in a similar vein, contends that mass produced music hinders genuine experiences and fosters regressive behaviours. See Theodor Adorno, 'On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening,' in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, (London: Routledge, 2001).

bourgeois class in Habermas.[68] Negt and Kluge, however, still see a moment of resistance *within* the realm of commodification and reification,[69] and therefore can contend that critical theory needs to confront commodified culture on its own terms. Given its ideological power and its pervasiveness, criticising it by appealing to ideal or abstract normative standards has become ineffective, they claim. (PSE, 79-80)[70] If there is a 'window' in every home, as Kluge says in reference to television, critical theory needs to tap into this medium—which after all *has* a democratic potential.[71] For Negt and Kluge, then, the only antidote to the illusions of the culture industry would be to reappropriate its mass media—which are only the forms through which peoples' fantasy, imagination, and wishes (i.e. their unsublated protest energies) are expressed. (PSE, 79-80)[72]

As I argue in detail in Chapter III, for Negt and Kluge the central problem with the culture industry is that it anchors people's protest energies to illusory products (commodities, use-values) which shape people's worldviews. Individuals, whose energies could otherwise lead to political organization or to the free development of their capacities, for example, are now content to see themselves 'represented' on the screen, or with the temporary gratification afforded by entertainment

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[68] See e.g. Peter Uwe Hohendahl, *The Institution of Criticism*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982): 245.

[69] Hohendahl, *The Institution of Criticism*, 245.

[70] As Hansen writes in her foreword to *Public Sphere and Experience*, for Negt and Kluge "the market, with its professed goal of catering to as many people as possible, still provided a better model for engaging the viewer's imagination than the bureaucratically protected enclaves of high culture." Hansen, 'Foreword,' xxiv.

[71] Kluge and Liebman, 'On New German Cinema, Art, Enlightenment, and the Public Sphere,' 40. Negt and Kluge were here influenced by Hans Magnus Enzensberger, whose seminal essays on the 'industrialization' of the mind and on the consciousness industry spoke of the need for an alternative media use, one where these are actually used as channels of communication. See H.M. Enzensberger, 'the Industrialization of the Mind,' and 'Constituents of a Theory of the Media,' in *Critical Essays*, (New York: Continuum, 1982). See also PSE, 99; 112.

[72] Negt and Kluge call fantasy a 'practical unconscious criticism of alienation,' and as I argue in Chapter III, it is a capacity through which obstinacy finds expression.

and advertisement. "The libidinal fantasies of human beings, their hopes, wishes, needs, are no longer set free," Negt and Kluge contend. (PSE, 172) Following from the analysis of the 'persistence of resistance' developed in *History and Obstinacy*, however, they contend that this attempt cannot but fail. This, because in order to 'seduce' peoples' fantasies and turn them into consumers, commodities *must* appeal to their repressed energies. Yet, in trying to construct needs by 'seducing' these, they also provide symbolic material with which individuals can reinterpret those needs, and eventually make them their own. This industry, it turns out, actually enriches people's consciousness, since it gives public articulation to what remained obscure and thus incomprehensible for subjects. (PSE, 173-174) The consciousness industry, where Adorno (and Habermas) saw merely ideology, is disclosed by Negt and Kluge as a site that partakes of a hegemonic struggle where subjects can (re)construct and (re)interpret their needs, interests and fantasies—and in so doing make them their own.

Negt and Kluge do not draw out the full political implications of their account of the ideological limits of mass culture. This is why, to support their argument, in Chapter IV I appeal to the work of Albrecht Wellmer, whose criticism of Adorno's aesthetics and his account of aesthetic reception allows for a better understanding of the role that (in particular popular and mass) culture has in the formation of oppositional social movements. Wellmer's critique of Adorno's aesthetics points toward a 'truth potential' in works of art that is dependent, *not* on their formal characteristics *nor* on their truthful representation of reality, but on the possibility for the receiving subject to 'disclose' and problematize its preconceptions about reality. This truth potential, according to Wellmer, inheres in the *relation* between the work and the receiver, and does not require of the latter any skills or pre-given knowledge to interpret the work truthfully.

With this move, Wellmer bursts open the emancipatory power of the aesthetic from the confines of autonomous art and, in line with Negt and Kluge, shows that even commodified forms of art can be emancipatory. What is more, because these bring people together and provide symbolic

materials that can be reappropriated (something 'high' art hardly ever does), they have an additional advantage. Namely, that they can facilitate the collective articulation of interests and needs, as well as a resignification of imposed identities. In the process, these can lose their personal character and be revealed as socially and historically produced, and thus as contingent *and* changeable.

Negt and Kluge's and Wellmer's resignification of mass and popular culture—which appears in their work as a site of domination *and* resistance—is triggered by the conviction that the 'culture industry' thesis does not describe accurately the conditions of modern capitalist societies. In spite of the pervasiveness of commodification, many counter-hegemonic groups and subcultures have emerged from the margins of culture and challenged the hegemonic logic of capitalism, something that the strong thesis of ideological manipulation cannot account for. Negt and Kluge's focus on the 'consciousness industry' as a site that appropriates and articulates people's fantasies and desires, and Wellmer's argument regarding the importance of the context of reception, draw attention to the ideological limits of the culture industry, which, even in reproducing reification, extends the limits of the subject. The concrete, public encounter with their own fantasies and capacities also allows individuals to refuse their socially-imputed roles and identities, or to question the reified social norms and values. This amounts to a shift from an 'unconscious critique' to an awareness of their alienation. The culture industry thus acts as an aesthetic vehicle from which counter-publics that gather around common interests, or around a common identity can emerge, coming together oppositional or counter-hegemonic spaces of resistance.

In Chapter V, I turn to Negt and Kluge's theory of the *political* role of those 'counter-public spheres'—the name Negt and Kluge give to these oppositional social movements—and analyse their contribution toward the constitution of a collective subject that could bring about a truly rational social change. As we will see, the centrality of these publics lies, first, in their 'consciousness raising'

function,[73] and second, in their preservation of the diversity and particularity of needs and interests—elements that, as mentioned, are central for the possibility to construct a truly rational society. With their account of counter-publics, Negt and Kluge can be seen to take seriously the desiderata within Adorno's notion of the global subject: namely, that a true and rational collectivity will be one where no interest or need goes unheard, and where individuals can interact and express themselves critically and autonomously.

In starting from counter-publics as the means to construct this global subject, Negt and Kluge's theory goes beyond Adorno's, which postulates the *need* for such a subject but cannot ground (or intervene toward) its eventual constitution. But it also goes beyond Habermas, whose normative concept of the 'bourgeois' public sphere—based on abstract concepts and idealizations such as 'consensus' and 'value neutrality'—is not tenable for a society where the norm is conflict and a heterogeneity of life contexts. Negt and Kluge's theory of counter-public spheres is construed as one that aims to be descriptive and critical—but also as one where critique is not detached from praxis. Their main contention is that to build a qualitatively new, truly democratic, and inclusive public sphere, the construction needs to start from the 'bottom up' (another of Negt and Kluge's recurring tropes), that is, from the concrete experiences of oppression and alienation and the "substantive life interests" that find expression in the plurality of discourses of counter-public spheres. (PSE, xlvi)

Nevertheless, Negt and Kluge are emphatic when asserting that while these 'cultural' or 'identity-based' counter-publics can play a central role toward the constitution of a truly rational society, their true transformative potential will only be tapped-in if these push for the constitution of

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[73] This is a term I adopt from the feminist movement, one of the most important counter-public spheres, and whose political actions I take to be paradigmatic of what Negt and Kluge attempt to articulate in their account of counter-public spheres. I discuss feminism as a political movement in Chapters V and VI below.

a more encompassing form of social organization. Thus why, according to them, as I argue in Chapter V, counter-publics cannot be deemed already autonomous, nor the identities constructed within them be called 'authentic.' Negt and Kluge are aware that while their pluralism can eventually lead to a non-violent synthesis of society, it can also easily lead to social fragmentation or to a retreat away from society. Insofar as counter-public spheres remain embedded within a capitalist society, that is, their members will remain subjected to a heteronomous logic. What is needed, thus, is for these publics to work toward the construction of a different public sphere and a new principle of social organization. One, that is, in which individuals can come together without losing their difference, and where people's individual and collective experiences are not disregarded. Finally, this new form of social organization would have to be one where individuals are in control of their own history. Only then would experience be self-produced, and only then would society be truly rational.

Negt and Kluge call this autonomously produced public sphere the 'proletarian' public sphere, which is the subject of the final chapter of this thesis (Chapter VI). Negt and Kluge define this public sphere as a qualitatively new 'social horizon of experience' where "no concrete interest remains excluded and unresolved." (PSE, 208) But they also speak of it as a process whereby *through* their concrete interests and experiences of alienation, subjects become aware of the contingency of the social structures, and thus of the possibility to organize society (and their experience) anew. The 'proletarian' public sphere, I argue in the first part of Chapter VI, can therefore be understood as the site where the 'global subject' comes into being, as well as the consciousness-raising process whereby it is formed.

Negt and Kluge have explicitly claimed that to sketch or provide the content of what this public sphere would actually turn out to look like cannot be done (something that is in line with their emphasis on a form of organization that emerges from the *self*-experience of the masses). Presently, it can only be defined *negatively* from the attempts to suppress or delegitimize "any public formation that

suggests an alternative autonomous organization of experience."[74] However, it is possible to extract a central premise from Negt and Kluge's work. According to it, both activists working within counter-publics and critical intellectuals have the political task to use their 'theoretical tools' in order to orient the protest energy of obstinacy and the imagination 'outward,' i.e. toward the oppressive structures of the public sphere, thus laying bare their historicity and contingency. Instead of disregarding fantasy, the imagination, people's 'obstinate' reactions—leaving them for capitalism and its culture industry to accumulate and monopolize—the labour of theory lies in working toward the production of the means and media where these can be autonomously reorganized. (PSE, 33)

Central for this project is the role of art, which I discuss in the final section of Chapter VI. As I argue in reference to Kluge's own aesthetic theory, art can oppose the apparent passivity and conformism forged by the consciousness industry and the political establishment, and allow its spectators to build connections between their unconscious fantasies and reality—a task for which rational language, abstraction, or conceptualization will not suffice. (PSE, 176) Art, given the nature of its medium, and given the pressing political situation under which capitalist societies find themselves, should not transcend its self-referentiality and idleness—ideas and discourses, criticism, by themselves, are not enough. (PSE, 79) For Negt and Kluge, art's political function (as is that of intellectual labour) is to "reorganize fantasies in order to make [the masses] capable of self-organization." (PSE, 176) The committed intellectual is thus one whose ideas are deployed as 'counter-products' which actively oppose the illusions of the mass media and of the hegemonic public sphere: "idea against idea, product against product, production sector against production sector." (PSE, 80)

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[74] Hansen, 'Foreword,' xxxii.

With the category of the 'proletarian' public sphere, Negt and Kluge are attempting to take Adorno's critical theory beyond its theoretical impasses by incorporating the social and political dimensions that it lacked. However, as I show throughout this thesis, with Adorno, Negt and Kluge still believe that only by retaining the centrality of the 'aesthetic' will the project of emancipation and reconciliation—one where happiness, particularity, and difference would not have to be sacrificed to the universal—have any chance. To precipitate the constitution of a 'proletarian' public sphere, Negt and Kluge insist, we need to fight off the hegemony of the bourgeois public sphere and the culture industry—which further the poverty of experience—and find ways in which the fantasies, the wishes and needs of the people (in short, their obstinate reactions) can be brought to consciousness.

For Negt and Kluge, in the persistence of fantasy and obstinacy—with their allergy to heteronomy and oppression—lies one of the most important productive forces for political change. Such somatic reactions, as Kluge writes, are the basis of the possibility for "people themselves determining their relations to their history, to their life, to the things they produce and to each other."[75] These reactions, however, cannot do without critique, without self-reflection. Hence why, for Negt and Kluge, if there is a political role for critical theory and art, this is not to push people toward a given and "particular political praxis" but to encourage the audiences to *see themselves* as the producers of their own meaning, of their own reality.[76] In this regard, Negt and Kluge could be said to subscribe to Marx famous account of critique, which postulates the need for

> the reform of consciousness not through dogmas but by analysing mystical consciousness obscure to itself . . . It will then become plain that the world has long since dreamed of

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[75] Alexander Kluge, 'Der Phantasie-Betrieb', in *Die Filmemacher: Zur neuen deutschen Produktion nach Oberhausen*, ed. Barbara Bronnen and Corinna Brocher, (Munich: Bertelsmann, 1972), 235.

[76] Alexander Kluge, 'The Political as Intensity of Everyday Feelings,' in *Alexander Kluge. Raw Materials*, 288.

> something of which it needs only to become conscious for it to possess it in reality.[77]

To reform people's consciousness, to foster the autonomy of individuals, so that humanity can build its own reality by following people's concrete needs and interests—this is the task for critical theory. For Negt and Kluge, as for Marx, this requires building bridges between people's dreams—those obstinate thoughts—and our present reality, allowing those somatic or unconscious forms of resistance to become a political force.

[77] Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton, (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 209.

Chapter I: Adorno's Political Aesthetics: The Reification of Consciousness and the Emancipatory Power of the Aesthetic

Does art have a role to play in emancipation? Is there any room for art or aesthetics in critical theory? Can art be 'political' at all, and if so, what would its role be? These questions were central to the critical project of the Frankfurt School. From Benjamin's reflections on storytelling and on 'the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction' to Horkheimer's and Marcuse's criticisms of culture; passing through Negt and Kluge's reflections on mass media, the consciousness industry, and task of the author; and even in Habermas' and Wellmer's attempt to decode the relation between art, language, and communication; the sphere of art—and more broadly, of the 'aesthetic'[78]—became a cornerstone in the attempt to finish what Habermas has called the 'unfinished project of modernity.'

Of course, not all of those thinkers gave the same prominence to the aesthetic within their projects, and perhaps for no other member of the Frankfurt School did art play a more central role than for Theodor Adorno. A trained musician, Adorno studied for a period with Alban Berg and became versed in the approach and ideas of Schoenberg and the second Viennese school. This encounter with atonal music—as has been noted by commentators like Axel Honneth and Susan Buck-Morss—left a huge mark in Adorno's way of approaching philosophy, but also in his way of facing reality.[79] But in order to understand why art became so central to his political and philosophical

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[78] I understand the aesthetic here in the terms mentioned above, namely as sense perception or perception by feeling, broadly construed. See footnote 29 above.

[79] See e.g. Axel Honneth, 'Communication and Reconciliation. Habermas' Critique of Adorno,' *Telos* 39 (March 1979): 53, and Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, (New York: The Free Press, 1977); esp. Chapters 5 and 8.

project, his interest in art (and in particular in music) must be read vis-à-vis the historical context in which Adorno's philosophy matured.

There were three major events that marked the path of Adorno's thought—all of which, as Habermas has pointed out, "converged in the disappointment of revolutionary expectations."[80] These were the 'bureaucratization' of the Soviet Union under Stalinism, the rise of Fascism in Germany and Europe; and the standardization and commodification of culture in the United States under the banner of a 'culture industry' fuelled by capitalism. For Adorno, these events went hand in hand with the appropriation of the wishes and hopes that had been placed on the Bolshevik Revolution; the unpredicted support of the working class for a project that ran against their own interests; and the conformism and apathy of a consciousness which had become standardized, unreflective, and dull under the power of capital and commodification. All of this seemed to confirm capitalism's power to appropriate and absorb every oppositional force, every threat to the *status quo*. (TCA, 367)[81] For Adorno, these phenomena pointed toward the reification and regression of individuals' conscious capacities, which was accompanied by the commodification of all spheres of society: from the family to law, and running through culture, leisure, morality, science. But in an ironic twist to Lukacs' theory (to which he was highly indebted), Adorno took this as a sign of the defeat of the hopes that Marxism had put in the proletariat as the potential 'Subject-Object' of history.[82]

The virtual dissolution of the ego—and with it, of the subject's capacities for a fully rational though—and the commodification of social and political institutions, led Adorno to the realization

[80] Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, vol. 1. Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984): 366. Cited hereafter in text as TCA, followed by page number.

[81] See also Dubiel, *Theory and Politics. Studies in the Development of Critical Theory*.

[82] Dubiel, *Theory and Politics*, 81-82.

that the possibility for emancipation (that is, of constructing what Horkheimer had described as a society where individuals are the producers of "their own historical form of life"[83]) had, at least for the near future, reached a dead-end. Without autonomous subjects, political movements or collective actions were doomed not only to fail, but to reinforce people's domination. Without autonomous individuals, politics were reduced to semblance: the semblance of democracy, of participation, of decision-making, of legitimate government. And so were practical struggles reduced to pseudo-activity—how could a 'collective' or 'global' subject decide and struggle rationally for its own aims, goals or orientations, if individuals were deprived of their rational capacities, which were co-opted by capitalism?[84] In view of this situation, Adorno believed that the energies of a critical theory of society had to turn from lending support to 'revolutionary' action or activism, and toward finding the basis of something that any successful form of collective action would require: the autonomous individual.

For Adorno, it was this foreclosure of political action and praxis that pushed thought toward areas where it could preserve its critical impulse. "The feigning of a true politics here and now, the freezing of historical relations which nowhere seem ready to melt, oblige the mind to go where it need not degrade itself," Adorno writes.[85] One of the places where mind had to take refugee was the sphere of art—a sphere that, because of its autonomy, remained (relatively) free of the coercive demands of a reified society, and, thus, where the mind could flee to avoid degradation. Adorno continues:

> it is to works of art that has fallen the burden of wordlessly asserting what is barred to politics ... This is not a time for political works of art, but politics has migrated into

[83] Horkheimer, 'Postscript,' 244.

[84] Theodor Adorno, 'Reflections on Class Theory,' in *Can one Live After Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*, Rolf Tiedemann (ed.), (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 96.

[85] Adorno, 'Commitment,' 89.

autonomous works, and nowhere more so than where these seem politically dead.[86]

Adorno's turn to (autonomous) art was not a turning *away* from politics—quite the opposite. But how successful is this turn as a political strategy?

In what follows, I want to hold on to the value of Adorno's account—a value that, I take it, is predicated on his construal of art's political task as *the generation of new forms of thinking and acting*. However, Adorno's account of a migration of the 'political' into art remains problematic, I contend, since this task depends on the *interpretation* of aesthetic truth, something that presupposes capacities, skills and knowledge that, according to Adorno himself, are virtually non-existing in modern capitalist societies.[87]

To anticipate, I argue that Adorno's account of the 'political' or 'emancipatory' role of art clashes with his social theory, insofar as his aesthetic theory presupposes a subject that—according to the latter—is virtually non-existent. Adorno argues, on the one hand, that the critical aspect of works of art depends on their 'import,' i.e. their formal construction, through which their critique of reality is constructed.[88] This implies that to understand—or rather, to decipher—this critique, the receiving subject must possess certain capacities and historical and social knowledge.[89] Nevertheless, on the other hand, Adorno theorizes the historical movement as a process of rationalization that has progressively reified the human consciousness, to the extent that—through mechanisms like the

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[86] Adorno, 'Commitment,' 89.

[87] Note that Adorno is not implying that it is *solely* to art that this political task has fallen, nor is my intention to claim that this is the case.

[88] Adorno, 'Commitment,' 85-86.

[89] More specifically, Adorno demands philosophical knowledge so that art's "incomprehensibility" is "recuperated by a theory that thinks its truth." (AT, 118) See also AT, 122.

culture industry—"conformity has replaced consciousness," as he writes.[90] Under these circumstances, art's truth cannot find a socially or historically relevant recipient that could comprehend it and (eventually) become the subject of a rational and collective praxis.[91]

Even granting to Adorno that an 'autonomous' artwork can act as a *safeguard* of humanity's hopes for emancipation and happiness, I claim, this does not say much about its political impact or social significance. Adorno's notion of the practical effect of art therefore remains unconvincing: art cannot be called political or practical (even in the weak sense of having an impact on social consciousness) if it its effects are detached from the society, historical context, and the subjects that need emancipation. Because in his account the truth of artworks is dependent on its import, then it remains accessible only to subjects already autonomous enough, and privileged enough, to have the skills and knowledge demanded for its formal deciphering.[92] But without a real possibility to undo the reification of consciousness at a socially significant level, the melancholic gaze of those lucky few would be doomed to contemplate the complete commodification and reification of society.[93] If art is construed as a site where resistance to the so-called 'course of the world' happens "solely through artistic form," then its utopian promises must remain unheard, unseen, impossible to read.[94]

Nevertheless, I argue that Adorno's idea of the political role of art, under the present historical circumstances—if understood as the indirect intervention in the recovery of the subject's autonomy—should not be discarded. To salvage the truth content of Adorno's account of the emancipatory role

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[90] Adorno, 'Culture Industry Reconsidered,' in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, (London: Routledge, 2001): 17. Cited hereafter in text as CIR, followed by the page number.

[91] Note that this does not mean that it cannot find *any recipient at all.*

[92] See, e.g. Hammer, *Adorno and the Political*, 81.

[93] See Adorno, 'Culture and Administration,' in *The Culture Industry*, 129. Adorno speaks there of "critics whose task it is to uphold the interest of the public against the public itself."

[94] Adorno, 'Commitment,' 80.

of art, however, we first need to show that his social diagnosis remains (i) plausible and compelling (and therefore should not be simply rejected) but that (ii) it is *overstated*. I take it that, in view of the current social and historical situation, Adorno's account of modernity and his call to fight reification through the generation of autonomy remains more compelling than one that, e.g., portrays modern societies and institutions as already rational. Yet, Adorno's account cannot be taken at face value, because if reification were complete, and if the effects of the consciousness industry were as dire as Adorno anticipated, then there would be no way to account for the rise of social movements (such as feminism or the Black liberation struggle) and their critiques of capitalism. What is more, the circuit between 'emancipatory' art and its addressee (merely the isolated intellectual) would become so sealed, so self-referential, that it would nullify itself as a source of critique oriented toward praxis. In following chapters I thus turn to the work of Negt and Kluge, and argue that while society remains under the spell of commodification and the logic of exchange, this need not imply that only isolated intellectuals can apprehend the critical potential of art, nor that is it only 'autonomous' art that possesses this potential.

In this chapter, I begin by reconstructing Adorno's account of the process of enlightenment, which, according to him, is a process of both rationalization and reification. But because of the way Adorno conceptualizes the constitution of the subject, he must commit himself to the thesis regarding the historical loss of subjective autonomy. This leads him to conclude that the subject of late capitalism is, for any practical purposes, extinct (section I). I then explain Adorno's account of the emancipatory potential of the aesthetic, which demands that art retreat from society if it is to retain a political potential. Given Adorno's insistence on the polemical relation between art and reality, it transpires that art cannot (directly, at least) communicate an emancipatory message. Hence why Adorno links the critical potential of art to its formal aspects and to the internal organization of the work, i.e., to what he calls its 'import.' However, this requires interpretation if this critical potential is to be

actualized, something that begs the question of who can perform such interpretation, and which severely limits the emancipatory power of the aesthetic (section II). Finally, I touch upon a notion of aesthetic experience (central for Negt and Kluge) which lurks underneath Adorno's insistence on the need for art to remain hermetic and incommunicable (section III). Aesthetic experience precedes understanding and does not require a type of interpretation that only certain educated, lucky individuals (equipped with capacities and skills that are virtually extinct) can perform. Yet, this experience can still aid individuals clarify their underlying 'feelings' of alienation, and allow new ways of relating to reality emerge.[95] In so doing, it provides a path to reconceptualize art's emancipatory potential, a path which I explore in following chapters.

I) The *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: Rationality, Subjectification and Reification

Adorno's philosophical diagnosis of modernity can be found in its more complete form in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, a book co-written with Max Horkheimer. According to them, the self-destruction of reason is part of a dialectical process that begins with a drive for self-preservation, an instinct of the human being—*qua* living organism—toward its survival. This instinct, according to Adorno, is what drives the subjects to the attempt to control everything that appears threatening because it is unknown—but ends up repressing inner nature (including the human desire for pleasure) and objectifying external nature. (DE, 11)[96] The subject that was supposed to be preserved, ends up being sacrificed. For Adorno, the subject's relation to the object becomes corrupt from the moment in which

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[95] As we will see below, Kluge and Negt link this to the capacity for fantasy and to what they call 'obstinacy,' a somatic, sensuous reaction against alienation.

[96] Adorno and Horkheimer write: 'Nothing is allowed to re-main outside, since the mere idea of the "outside" is the real source of fear.' (DE, 11)

instrumental thinking (including the subsumption under concepts) proves to be more effective for self-preservation than other forms of behaviour such as mimesis (of which I say more below). It becomes a relation mediated by the concept, by a means-ends rationality whereby what remains 'outside' the subject is tendentially reduced to its universalizable components, and so rendered abstract. At the historical level, this movement triggers a gradual reduction of reason to instrumental reason, and of reality to a rationalized system of domination. And while for Adorno the subject *does* develop through this process, this development cannot be deemed truly rational, since it happens for the sake of sacrificing its inner drives, desires, and needs—that is, by repressing a part of itself and, with this, the possibility for happiness and self-realization.

I cannot do full justice to Adorno's account of the 'dialectic of enlightenment' here. What I want to highlight at this stage is that, according to him, throughout this process of rationalization a different (non-instrumental) form of relating to the 'other' is gradually repressed. This is the mimetic element of our rationality (an element that can be deemed 'aesthetic,' insofar as it remains sensual, perceptive), through which we imitate or copy the 'other' without trying to control it. Mimesis denotes, in short, an *affinity* with the other which preserves its difference. (ND, 45) Through mimetic comportment, however, reason foregoes the claim to gain knowledge of its object. Hence why as the impulse for control and objectification grows stronger, so is mimesis 'forgotten.'[97] Even as the subject ends up dominating both the world and itself, it is only able to do so (to 'understand') through the hardened, systematic means-ends rationality. Albrecht Wellmer glosses this position out as follows:

> instrumental spirit, which is itself a part of the living world, is ultimately capable of articulating itself only in categories of a dead nature; as an objectifying principle, the instrumental spirit is in its very origins oblivious of itself, and being oblivious of itself,

[97] "All reification is forgetting," Adorno and Horkheimer famously write. (DE, 191)

> establishes itself as a universal system of delusion, a closed universe of instrumental reason. (TSR, 4)

As Wellmer comments, for Adorno the price paid for the constitution of a unified subject is the repression of that subject's inner nature and of its impulses toward pleasure and happiness. Hence why the repressor becomes its own victim; subjectification becomes self-sacrifice. (TSR, 3-4)

This rupture between subject and object—a separation of humans from nature steered through instrumental reason—does not lead from nature toward freedom or autonomy, Adorno argues. A world constructed following a reason reduced to following logical processes becomes automated, bureaucratized, guided by formal imperatives, something that implies that everything particular, everything that resists categorization, is pushed aside. Capitalism, for Adorno, is but the pinnacle of this fear-driven need to control and dominate.[98] Capitalism's drive to maximize profit is but the "outgrowth" of the subject's attempt to control nature. In this situation, every human need, every human goal is forgotten, eaten up by the compulsion to maximize profit.[99] Reason itself, by its own nature, forgoes the subject and starts to function as the motor that drives a process that leads to what Adorno, following Weber, characterizes as a 'totally administered system.'

For Adorno, both the 'democratic' capitalism of the United States and the state capitalism of the Soviet Union were exemplars of this system toward which all the world was moving. Capitalism gives full expression to the entwinement of subjectification and reification, where the desire for self-preservation ends up displacing just what it wanted to preserve, i.e. the self. As Fabian Freyenhagen

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[98] See Lambert Zuidervaart, 'Theodor W. Adorno,' in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* Edward N. Zalta (ed.), (Winter 2015 Edition). https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2015/entries/adorno/.

[99] Fabian Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy. Living Less Wrongly*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 30. Freyenhagen writes: "Capitalism is just the latest and most advanced socio-economic system in a series of such systems which resulted from the pursuit of self-preservation."

puts it, "capitalism is the ultimate form of a means-ends reversal: what developed as a way of securing human needs has become an end in itself, using human needs (both real ones and those capitalism artificially creates) for its own purposes."[100]

In Adorno's account, neither the objective conditions nor the capacities that would allow humans to autonomously develop individually or collectively are present within capitalist societies. As the logic of instrumental rationality becomes universalized, every object is reduced to a commodity that can be exchanged, in a process which structures reality in ways that reproduce oppression and do not satisfy human needs. This process, however, has "real objectivity and is objectively untrue." (ND, 190) Hence why it affects the constitution of the subject as well: consciousness—forgetful of its mimetic aspect—becomes universally reified, unable to perceive humans and human relations as anything more than means.

But the process whereby the subject is formed not only takes as its victim the 'irrational' or mimetic aspect of rationality. Even the logical or formal capacities of thinking are vacated, insofar as they are projected 'outwards,' toward institutions or technologies that subjects can no longer comprehend. This is why Adorno emphasizes the automated and planned nature, as well as the division of labour that characterize capitalist societies, and why—again following Weber—he believes that the increasing rationalization is not equal to a *generalized* increase in knowledge of our social and historical conditions. As Weber had argued, the modern individual knows substantially less about its conditions than, e.g., a pre-capitalist peasant did.[101] Given this diagnosis, a reconciled society (one

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[100] Freyenhagen, *Living Less Wrongly*, 31.

[101] "Unless he is physicist, one who rides on a street car has no ideas how the car happened to get in motion...He is satisfied that he may 'count' on the behaviour of the street car...The savage knows incomparable more about his tools...Increasing intellectualization and rationalization do not, therefore, indicate an increased and general knowledge of the conditions under which one lives." Max Weber, 'Science as a Vocation,' in *Essays in Sociology*, trans.

guided by an emphatic notion of reason) becomes inconceivable, and its realization cannot but appear as an impossible task.[102]

Adorno's 'subject of capitalism' can therefore be characterized by the repression of its drives and impulses, and by the halted development of its 'rational' capacities. While individuals, at an immediate level, can feel the suffering caused by repression, they cannot know or apprehend the reasons for this suffering. Life feels meaningless, foreign, and subjects don't have the cognitive tools to understand why. This leaves subjects vulnerable, willing to accept any external answer that provides satisfaction, however fleeting or illusory.[103] The capitalist system, Adorno argues, can now impose false needs and desires in order to "[mitigate] the very same fear of the inexorability of social processes."[104] Without access to its rational capacities, the subjects' needs and interests can be easily interpreted in advance, manipulated by political parties and the culture industry. Conversely, without access to real (as in self-posited, reflected upon) needs and desires, subjects cannot rationally posit their own ends, and get trapped in a vicious cycle of instrumentality. It is in this vein that Adorno writes that the *ratio* of an automated society taps into the core of our unconscious, "[conspiring] to annihilate the mediating ego."[105]

H.H. Gerth and C.W. Mills, (London: Routledge, 1991), 139.

102 See Wellmer, 'Reason, Utopia, and the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*,' in *Habermas and Modernity*, ed. Richard Bernstein, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 47. Hereafter cited in text as RUE followed by page number.

103 See Jay Bernstein, 'Introduction,' in *The Culture Industry. Selected Essays*, 15. This is not to say that Adorno did not consider illusion to have a positive value, something I will not discuss in detail. For more on this see, e.g., Christopher Pavsek's discussion of the power of illusion in Adorno, Kluge and Marx in the last chapter or *The Utopia of Film*.

104 Theodor Adorno, *Gessamelte Schriften* band 9, vol. 2, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1975), 25. Cited in Bernstein, 'Introduction,' 15.

105 Theodor Adorno, 'Sociology and Psychology,' *New Left Review* I/46, (November-December 1967): 95.

The problem for Adorno, then, is not that certain social processes can function instrumentally, but that this happens without the mediation of consciousness (of the ego). This, for its part, makes subjective impulses regressive, archaic; and society a cold, alienating shell: "the triumphant archaic impulses, the victory of id over ego, harmonize with the triumph of society over the individual."[106] Or as he also puts it:

> The subject is separated into the inner continuation of the machinery of social reproduction and an undissolved remainder which, as a mere preserve powerless in the face of the wildly expansionist 'rational' component, degenerates into a mere curiosity.[107]

Instead of controlling social reproduction and mediating its impulses and desires, the inverse seems to happen. The possibility of emancipation, which for Adorno would require changing the objective conditions "that condemn mankind to impotence and apathy," (ND, 190) and which would the individuals to emerge from tutelage, is progressively eliminated as society becomes disenchanted and rationalized. For Adorno, instead, society is moving toward ever-more reification: "The subjects of the drive economy are being psychologically expropriated, and the drive economy is being more rationally operated by society itself." (DE, 168) The mediation between super-ego, and id (in short, between the moral and social values and its impulses), supposed to be performed by the ego, now happens outside of the individual. No conscious decision has to be taken: not about how to act in a specific situation, not about how to satisfy a need, nor even about which needs are legitimate. This is why, ultimately, for Adorno the subjects of capitalism cannot reach a state of maturity or autonomy. The subject's attempt at self-preservation, instead of leading toward self-realization, ends up virtually

[106] Adorno, 'Sociology and Psychology,' 95.

[107] Adorno, 'Sociology and Psychology,' 80.

destroying the subject. Instead of satisfaction, the subject is extinguished: "The process is one of liquidation instead of sublation." (DE, 170)[108]

Adorno describes the culture industry as performing 'psychoanalysis in reverse' because the process of internalization of authority is once again externalized. Individuals are not expected to think by themselves anymore, they don't have to be vigilant of their drives, or problematize the social codes and norms: everything is provided in advance, and they—unaware even of what provides real satisfaction, real happiness—just follow. "Now that thinking has become a mere sector of the division of labor, the plans of the authorized experts and leaders have made individuals who plan their own happiness redundant." (DE, 169)[109] The diagnosis provided by Adorno and Horkheimer is totalizing: the human being is gradually turning into a non-person, no longer a bearer of reason, nor aware of its own needs and desires, they conclude. For Adorno, the logical conclusion of this appropriation of conscious and unconscious capacities is that the individual becomes only the *caput mortem* of what a human being could be.

It is noteworthy that Adorno concedes that there *are* certain 'privileged' individuals who still retain a capacity for 'experience.' (ND, 41)[110] Importantly, given the all-pervasiveness of the

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[108] See also Adorno and Horkheimer, quoted in TCA, 380: "[T]he substance which is dominated, suppressed and undone by self-preservation is none other than that very life for which the accomplishments of self-preservation are supposed to be functional; it is in fact just what is supposed to be preserved."

[109] See also DE, 168: "For the human being as wage earner the decision is taken by a hierarchy extending from trade associations to the nation administration; in the private sphere it is taken by the schema of mass culture, which appropriates even the most intimate impulses of its forced consumers. The committees and stars function as ego and superego, and the masses, stripped of even the semblance of personality, are molded far more compliantly by the catch words and models than ever the instincts were by the internal censor."

[110] Adorno does not completely justify *just how this might happen*, but given the above, it would seem that the possibility to still have one's own experience requires that (i) these individuals retain some contact with drives and capacities (which the hegemonic society deems 'irrational') or at least some amount of spontaneity of thought. These, further,

administered world, only those 'lucky' subjects that remain 'outside' the reifying logic of capitalism and instrumental thinking (be it because of, e.g., certain types of education, because of their upbringing, or economic affluence) would retain the capacity to comprehend (to a major or minor degree) something about the illusory nature of reality. But, paralleling his argument about *autonomous* works of art (discussed below), Adorno contends that such privilege can only be maintained because of the marginal position vis-à-vis reality. Hence why Adorno assumes that the knowledge that they might accrue by virtue of their privilege cannot be (not in any substantial or direct sense) democratically shared:

> Only a mind which [the administered world] has not entirely molded can withstand it ... Under social conditions—educational ones, in particular—[…] it would be fictitious to assume that all men might understand, or even perceive, all things. (ND, 41)

Given the state of their consciousness, Adorno argues above, no one but the very lucky few are able to understand their social conditions or to think critically. Further, those privileged enough to think rationally or critically seem to be unable to use their means—their conceptual tools, their insights—to expand or orient the experiences of the not-so-lucky others. Given the state of the world, for Adorno, trying to communicate one's knowledge is the easiest path toward corrupting it: "We must resist the all but universal compulsion to confuse the communication of knowledge with knowledge itself," Adorno writes (ND, 41). But stronger still, it would seem that, insofar as impulses and needs are co-opted by the administered world (e.g., by the culture industry or by political propaganda), not even the spontaneous feelings of rejection or disgust can serve as a springboard for thought. (ND, 41) Unless, that is, certain cognitive capacities are already in place. But insofar as this

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(ii) would have to be mediated through (rather than replace) the rational capacities for synthesis and logical thinking acquired through a critical education or training.

is the case, and insofar as Adorno contends that virtually everyone's minds are always already shaped, it seems that these impulses have no true emancipatory potential. From Adorno's position, the generalized state of regression of consciousness appears to be unavoidable, while those lucky enough to 'understand' remain irremediably trapped in the 'ivory tower.'

II) The Commodification of Society: The Culture Industry and Autonomous Art

Adorno's thesis regarding the weakening—he talks of the virtual dissolution—of the subject was one of the aspects that that led him to distrust 'official' politics, as well as suspect the revolutionary impact of *current* collective action—neither, he considered, were plausible avenues for bringing about a historical change in the near future. If there was a political task that could eventually bring about a truly rational society, its focus would therefore have to be, *in the first place*, the formation of autonomous, critical individuals. It was the lack of these that made Adorno contend, as Freyenhagen writes, that revolutionary praxis was "postponed for the foreseeable future."[111] With the ego obsolete, and the authority figures of the state and culture addressing and manipulating the id directly, the development of a self-conscious, autonomous individuals—on a scale that could bring about a rational social change—seemed to be temporarily foreclosed.[112] For Adorno, emancipatory movements and practical interventions could not work, because, presently, there were not enough autonomous individuals that could engage critically with democratic processes. Note that this is not a matter of whether a few individuals could become autonomous (something that Adorno would have granted as possible), but of whether this could happen on a substantially relevant scale (a possibility Adorno's

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[111] Freyenhagen, 'Adorno's Politics,' 3.

[112] "By reproducing the life of society in a planned way," Adorno writes, "the ruling classes reproduce the impotence of those that are planned." Adorno, 'Reflections on Class Theory,' 109.

theory forecloses). *This* is what made it apparently impossible to form a genuine 'global subject,' one constituted of fully formed and thinking individuals.

The question I want to ask now is why did this trigger a shift toward art and some forms of philosophizing in Adorno's thought.[113] What is special about art, according to Adorno, that could help in the process toward the future constitution of an emancipated and collective subject? And in particular, why did Adorno favour certain types of art? As we will see, the role art has to play is closely related to that lack of autonomous and self-reflective subjects, which were needed for the constitution of a 'true' collective. The importance that art and culture acquire for Adorno, I argue, derives from the fact that to reach autonomy, individuals require the full development of their rationality—not only of the formal or instrumental capacities, but also of the mimetic and sensual. Art, insofar as it could synthesize the mimetic with the instrumental, was not only able to (formally) instantiate this 'full' rationality: it could also show individuals that this synthesis was possible, thus helping them expand their own rationality.[114] According to this, if there is an emancipatory or cognitive function to art and culture it would be that of generating consciousness and problematizing reality, of reverting the standardization and homogenization of individuals—thus opening up the possibility of a future rational and collective action. Nevertheless, I want to argue that there is still a problem in Adorno's construal of art's function.

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[113] I will not focus on the latter, but suffice it to say that Adorno also considered philosophy (in particular, negative dialectics) as a form of resistance to the violence of identity thinking. For more on this, see, e.g., Theodor Adorno, 'Resignation,' or aphorism 152, '*Warning: not to be misused*,' in *Minima Moralia*, 244-247.

[114] Thus, contrary to what, e.g., Wellmer has argued (RUE, 48-49), for Adorno art did more than just 'model' what reconciliation could be. It also intervened (and thus expanded) the consciousness of those that could interpret this message properly.

The problem is that while art *can* function to generate what we could call a 'critical' consciousness, according to Adorno, this can only happen when the receiving subject is able to decode art's truth content, which is encoded in its import, i.e. in its formal construction. This truth content—ultimately the criterion of validity for the artwork—is tied to the negativity of reality, and is related, according to Adorno's work, to the preservation of a 'promise of happiness' and the possibility of reconciliation. Crucially, for Adorno the possibility to 'grasp' this truth is tied to the correct interpretation of the artwork, which could then generate a true knowledge about reality. But this presupposes a subject capable of decoding such truth—a subject that, given the demand for such a high degree of knowledge and rationality, cannot be construed from within Adorno's own account of modern subjectivity. In a nutshell, the problem is that the possibility of grasping aesthetic truth presupposes an *already rational* subject. This implies that only those 'lucky' enough to already be 'outside' the grasp of the system can apprehend the truth of art. In the final section, I argue that by making a distinction between aesthetic truth and the aesthetic experience, it is possible to salvage the cognitive-emancipatory power of the aesthetic. This is a distinction to which I return in following chapters.

II.1 Art, Autonomy, and Reconciliation: the Aesthetic Recovery of The Subject?

For Adorno, not all artworks are created equal, and not all are suited for critique. According to Adorno's aesthetic theory and his critique of the culture industry, only art that is autonomous and negative towards reality can have truth content, and by implication, be critical. Adorno, as we will see, had good reasons for believing this. To anticipate, autonomous art was in position to resist commodification and thus avoid falling prey to the reductive logic of capitalism and identity thinking. Autonomy allowed it to retain its own internal normativity, making it—alongside certain types of

philosophy—the safeguard of the possibility of eventually reaching a state of reconciliation. This, because in following its self-posited logic, and by not being constructed with any direct social purpose, an autonomous artwork—a goal in itself—could be read as a critique of a society dominated by an instrumental rationality that became irrational by forgetting its human goals. Art's social function is its "functionlessness," Adorno claims. (AT, 297)[115] Further, the successful work's internal construction—a non-violent synthesis of spontaneity and technical skill, a fusion of material where the particular and the universal coexisted—represented (for the acute onlooker) the full use of reason, thus showing that the realization of rationality (on a social scale) was a living possibility, therefore anticipating a state of reconciliation. (AT, 9)

The so-called popular arts and the culture industry, for their part, had become complicit with the dynamics and logic of capitalism: instead of working towards a democratic society where human needs were met, these only promised goods that they could not deliver and, by presenting a false image of reality, helped reproduce the *status quo*.[116] We can therefore say that, for Adorno, the primordial way in which art can intervene in an emancipatory project is related to its truth content, which a work of art possesses when (i) it instantiates a critique of reality and (ii) acts as a safeguard of the possibility of transforming it by exposing its historicity and contingency. By putting these two together, art would be able to show that the real is irrational, but also that it can be transformed.[117]

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[115] Adorno continues: "Through their difference from a bewitched reality, they embody negatively a position in which what is would find its rightful place, its own. Their enchantment is disenchantment." (AT, 297)

[116] "Without admitting it they [cultural consumers] sense that their lives would be completely intolerable as soon as they no longer clung to satisfactions which are none at all." Theodor Adorno, 'Culture Industry Reconsidered,' *New German Critique*, No. 6 (Autumn, 1976): 16. Cited hereafter in text as CIR followed by page number.

[117] "Radical modern art is hated . . . because it reminds us of missed chances, but also because by its sheer existence it reveals the dubiousness of the heteronomous structural ideal." (ND, 95) See also, e.g., ND, 397.

Note that, because in order to convey its truth content the artwork would have to break from society, as Adorno argues, the artwork's communication of such a truth becomes, if not virtually impossible, at least very difficult. For someone immersed within society's structures, or caught in the web of reification and rationalization, an adequate comprehension of an autonomous work of art—one that captures the aesthetic as a critique of society and as a prefiguring of reconciliation—seems to be off the table.[118] Yet, for Adorno, only in this way would art be able to unearth a truth about reality, instead of only repeating a 'message' already drilled by the culture industry and administered to preserve the established social order.[119] Hence why Adorno criticized not only explicitly propagandistic or ideological works, but also what he called 'committed' art (i.e. politically engaged art). According to him,

> commitment often means bleating what everyone is already saying or at least secretly wants to hear. The notion of a 'message' in art, even when politically radical, already contains an accommodation to the world: the stance of the lecturer conceals a clandestine entente with the listeners, who could only be truly rescued from illusions by refusal of it.[120]

For Adorno, artworks that try to be explicitly political are only giving the audience what they expect to receive; and given that the consciousness of the audiences is moulded by the culture industry, these expectations are not even of their own making, but only express what is externally prescribed. (CIR, 16) Even the most 'politically radical' of artworks, thus—e.g. those films, paintings, or music that call for direct action—are accounted for in the administered society.[121] Adorno contends, for

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[118] I return to the relation between critique and reconciliation in detail in Chapter IV, where I discuss Wellmer's critique of Adorno's aesthetics.

[119] "What is social in art is its immanent movement against society, not its manifest opinions." (AT, 297)

[120] Adorno, 'Commitment,' 88.

[121] Adorno's hobby horse is, as known, Bertolt Brecht, whose didactic plays were only preaching to the converted

example, that those 'representational' works that explicitly show off their radicalness are "a priori comforting." (AT, 278)[122] Or works that attempt to be 'relevant,' lose such relevance when they attempt to say 'something,' to give a political message.[123] At best, these works end up falling for a *naiveté*, becoming dull or superficial. At worse, they serve as a form of what Marcuse would call "repressive desublimation": Within the administered world, these say, you can be as radical as you want in your leisure activities, which pass as liberating, but you will not break with the established order.[124]

In order to avoid furthering repression and the atrophy of thought—and thus to preserve their truth (the meaning of which will be expounded below)—works of art have, indeed, to *oppose* society, Adorno contends, but not through explicit political dogma. Rather, their autonomy is the standard for such opposition. This *does not* mean that artworks should act under the belief that they were 'outside' society, but rather implies their transgression of the "social contract with reality,"[125] that is, the denial to follow the demands for functionalism and 'effect.' Or as Adorno puts it, the possibility to "close [their] eyes and ears against [reality]."[126] Autonomy is made possible, then, by virtue of the manipulation of the material—its formation—which, in solely following the internal normativity of the work and the art-historical context, they resist the spell of a commodified, functionalized society.[127]

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and threatened to flatten out the direness of the political reality of its time.

[122] "[T]hat radically abstract images can be displayed in public spaces without irritating anyone does not justify any restoration of representational art, which is a priori comforting even when Che Guevara is chosen for the goal of reconciliation with the object." (AT, 278)

[123] Adorno, 'Commitment,' 77.

[124] See Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man,* (London: Routledge, 2002), 75-8.

[125] Adorno, 'Commitment,' 77.

[126] Adorno, 'Commitment,' 89.

[127] See e.g. Owen Hulatt, 'Critique through Autonomy: On Monads and Mediation in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*,' in *Aesthetic and Artistic Autonomy*, ed. Owen Hulatt, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013) for more on Adorno's notion of

For Adorno, artworks' 'political impact,' then, is not measured vis-à-vis the direct intervention in politics, but vis-à-vis the success or failure to perform this wresting-off of the material from the laws of society—this sublimation of heteronomy into autonomy, as it were. Note that if artworks were trying to intervene in politics, or give a message—making them have a 'function' or to be 'practical'—they would remain tied to a reifying logic. The true political role of art is rather a function of its autonomy, of its opposition to instrumentality.

The type of political impact that Adorno thinks art can have is expressed in crucial statements like the following:

> As eminently constructed and produced objects, works of art, even literary ones, point to a practice from which they abstain: the creation of a just life;[128]

> [T]he fact that artworks exist signals the possibility of the nonexisting. The reality of artworks testifies to the possibility of the possible. (AT, 174)

What is central for Adorno is the possibility that something different can exist—a different type of practical rationality in which not everything must serve as empty means. The artwork, as an object that serves no direct purpose, would be able to disclose—when properly interpreted—the path toward the possibility of a 'just life' where humans are not only means for the expansion of profit. But furthermore, as 'purposeless,' artworks would also criticize the demand for purpose, which is the common coin of a society where everything must be exchangeable.

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aesthetic autonomy.

[128] Adorno, 'Commitment,' 89.

II.2 Formal Liberation

For Adorno, aesthetic truth emerges through the formal construction of the work, i.e. through all that encompasses the internal organization of the material. Following Zuidervaart, I call this the 'import' [*Gehalt*] of the work of art, in order not to confuse it with the form (i.e. the merely technical aspects of the work).[129] Through its import, the artwork can wrest its material from the heteronomy of empirical reality and shape it 'non-violently' (i.e. mimetically), acquiring its truth content. Consequently, the emancipatory potential of a work of art will depend on the success of its constructive and formal principles. In what follows, I further elucidate the relation between the internal organization of the work and its truth, on the one hand, and emancipation, on the other, and contend that narrowing down the emancipatory potential to the work's formal aspects is problematic as a political strategy that aims at an eventual social praxis. Adorno's aesthetic theory, I conclude, fails to account for the political role of art as it concerns the constitution of critical, autonomous individuals.

A helpful way of interpreting the relation between truth content and aesthetic form, which I take to be mostly correct, regards the interaction between the subject (the artist) and the object (the aesthetic material)—a relation where the former shapes or constructs the latter through technique and the use of technologies. According to commentators like Zuidervaart or Wellmer, who interpret Adorno in this way, aesthetic import points toward the interaction of content and form, also expressed

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[129] 'Form' is actually an overdetermined concept in Adorno's aesthetic theory: sometimes referring *merely* to the technical 'formation' of the material, sometimes to the dialectic between technique and material. Sometimes, it comes to denote something much stronger, the 'essence' of art itself, as it were: "The concept of form marks out art's sharp antithesis to an empirical world." (AT, 187) For an in-depth analysis of this concept in Adorno's literary works, see Josh Robinson, *Adorno's Poetics of Form*, (New York: SUNY Press, 2018). Hence why I use the concept of 'import' as spelled out by Zuidervaart. See Zuidervaart, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory*, 122-125.

by Adorno as a tension between mimesis (the spontaneous, non-dominating capacity that is otherwise repressed) and rational construction.[130] In a successful work—one whose import is 'truthful'—the former is spiritualized (or objectified) and the latter arrested from its instrumentality.[131] Technical reason is thus 'liberated,' insofar as it now follows the demands of the material, instead of *imposing* its forms rigidly.[132]

This dialectic of form and content, we could say, creates—within society—a space that is free from the imperatives of that same society. In an increasingly commodified world—where rationality is increasingly instrumental and where mimesis is seen as irrational, as regressive—the work of art acts as an oasis. But because this space is created using material and forms that are ultimately part of society, it also unearths the possibility that the whole society could be different. The heteronomous materials and techniques, we could say, become, inside of the work, directed only through the normativity of art. As Lambert Zuidervaart puts it:

> When these categories turn into artistic forms of space, time, or causality, their lawfulness is shown to be alterable, and the liberation of society from subjectively dictated lawfulness becomes a concrete possibility. [For] Adorno, artistic form provides a liberating transformation of socially formative forms.[133]

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130 TSR, 5: "Art and philosophy thus constitute the two realms of activity in which the spirit breaks through the crust of reification by means of the close interaction of rationality with mimesis."

131 Zuidervaart, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory*, 123.

132 As Paddison comments, according to Adorno "[t]he total domination of material is at the same time the self-domination of the expressive subject. . .[This] results in the subject's loss of freedom." Max Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993): 267. See also AT, 356.

133 Zuidervaart, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory*, 129.

Without going into the details regarding the charged concept of 'truth' in Adorno's aesthetics, suffice it to say that, for him, the import of art becomes 'true' (i.e. it provides the work with truth content) when its forms synthesise the content in a way that follows only the internal laws of the work and, in as such, negate the (violent, reductive) social integration of universal and particular carried through identity thinking and instrumental reason. The possibility to create an artwork where universal and particular, subject and object, are related in a non-controlling, non-violent way, anticipates something *that is not yet*, and shows that rationality could be otherwise. In doing so, it also exposes that a different social organization remains possible.[134] Art allows the onlooker that manages to grasp its truth to experience that possible redemption between humanity and nature, subject and object, as something objectively possible. And I emphasize that for Adorno, it does *not* do this because it produces an image of what a redeemed humanity might look like.[135] Rather, this possibility is posited through the way art manages to arrange its material following its own logic, something which allows it to break with the type of violent synthesis that dominates reality. It is through its internal, non-instrumental logic, that art exposes what has been "veiled by the mastery [over the empirical world] of the omnipotent subject." (AT, 86) This is how, according to Adorno, artistic form "disenchants the disenchanted world." (AT, 75) As Adorno writes: "Praxis is not the effect of works; rather, it is

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[134] Note, however, that this does not imply that it shows a better organizing principle. This is why, contrary to what Wellmer argues, aesthetic truth does not mean that art models the relations between humans in a liberated society. (RUE, 48) Rather, they only expose that a different way of relating is possible: whether these relations would be similar to those between the elements in the work of art is not something that Adorno contends anywhere in his aesthetic theory.

[135] Adorno, who as has been noted was influenced by the Jewish ban on graven images [*Bilderverbot*] contends that such an image of 'utopia' or 'reconciliation' should not be depicted, even if this were possible. See, e.g. AT, 322: "the taboo that prohibits knowledge of any positive utopia also reigns over artworks." Hence Adorno's suspicion about representative artworks, such as film.

encapsuled in their truth content." (AT, 322) For Adorno, it is not what artworks try to say that provides them with truth content; such truth is contained in *how* they say it.

Aesthetic truth becomes emancipatory when the receiving subject is able to apprehend it—but because this truth is tied to the formal organization of the work, this truth is already contained within the work, something that reduces the role of the receiving subject to its correct interpretation. Hence why, for example, Adorno insists that the sociology of art should not focus on reception, but on the immanent content of the work which "can be deciphered from the form and technique of the work."[136] As Hohendahl rightly puts it, according to Adorno the immanent social content can be read off without

> recourse to the empirically derived or contingent reactions of reader or audience. The reader, spectator or listener does not appear as an independent category determining the work because Adorno never questions the hermeneutic act of understanding.[137]

That Adorno is presupposing a quasi-ideal receiver is one of the (many) reasons why Adorno emphasizes that artworks behave like windowless monads, which can forego communication. This is also why the individual reception tends to be dismissed: When Adorno speaks of aesthetic experience—which he indeed considers to be a necessary moment for the unfolding of art's truth—it is never understood in relation to personal experiences or to the social and historical context where the reception takes place.[138]

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[136] Peter Uwe Hohendahl, 'Introduction to Reception Aesthetics,' *New German Critique*, No. 10, (Winter, 1977): 31-32.

[137] Hohendahl, 'Introduction to Reception Aesthetics,' 32.

[138] See AT, 320, where Adorno uses the category of experience qua reified, instrumental experience [*Erlebnis*] to refer to a failed relation to the artwork. This implies that only through a fully lived experience [*Erfahrung*] can apprehend the artwork's truth. The latter however, is only accessible by the 'lucky' few in a capitalist society. I return to these

This dismissal is coherent with Adorno's diagnosis of modern subjectivity, since taking primary individual experiences for granted would be akin to reproducing reified consciousness. In short, because Adorno presumes society to be 'totally administered,' he is prone to dismiss the relevance of reception, which takes the back seat, giving priority to whatever is already within the work. This does not mean that Adorno separates art's truth from the interpreting subject, but that, according to him, there will be *one* correct interpretation. Hence why, according to him, the truth of the work "in-itself is commensurable to philosophical interpretation and coincides ... with the idea of philosophical truth." (AT, 172) For Adorno, only a very specific type of receiver, one that lives up to the demands of the work of art, will be able to apprehend its truth.

II.3 Aesthetic Truth: Experience or Interpretation?

What, then, is required in order for the receiver to grasp aesthetic truth? The answer to this question is central if one is to assess the plausibility of Adorno's argument regarding the migration of 'politics' into art, since what needs to be elucidated is whether or not art's cognitive-emancipatory potential—as Adorno construes it—is truly relevant for politics. In order to provide an answer, the first thing to note is that, given Adorno's construal of aesthetic truth, the path to aesthetic truth is made dependent on the possibility to follow correctly the work's structural/formal constitution. This is expressed in a very suggestive passage cited by Wellmer, where Adorno speaks of interpretation:

> [T]he kind of imagery in which we should have to conceive [interpretation] today is likely to be that of travelling along the same route, of mentally tracing the tensions laid down in the work of art and the processes that have become objectified in it. We do not understand

central categories below when discussing Negt and Kluge's work.

> a work of art by translating it into concepts ... but by entering into its immanent dynamic – I would almost say that the way to understand it is for our ear to recompose it, for our eye to paint it, for our speech organs to speak it anew, according to its own particular logic.[139]

In a later passage, found in *Aesthetic Theory*, this idea of entering into the work and letting oneself be carried by its internal dynamic, is complemented with the idea that a genuine aesthetic experience "demands something on the order of the self-denial of the observer, his capacity to address or recognize what aesthetic objects themselves enunciate and what they conceal. Aesthetic experience first of all places the observer at a distance from the object." (AT, 439)[140] From these two passages, we get the sense that, for Adorno, aesthetic understanding—as compared to 'conceptual' or 'semiotic' understanding—presupposes the possibility to enter the artwork, i.e. to be immersed in it, *and* the capacity to follow its formal composition. Furthermore, by combining these two claims, Adorno links the possibility to read off art's truth to the prior possibility for the work to affect the receiver in such a way that the receiving subject can leave one's personal characteristics, one's desires and expectations, behind—it requires artworks that can draw the receiver in. Recalling Kant, Adorno thus writes that "aesthetic comportment is free from immediate desire." (AT, 12)

The first step in this twofold process entwines the emancipatory power of art to the possibility to arrest individuals from the power of a reality that, aided by the culture industry, pre-shapes people's mode of experience, their understanding. As João Pedro Cachopo puts it, "[o]nly insofar as the

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[139] Theodor Adorno, 'Voraussetzungen', in *Noten zur Literatur*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, band 11, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974), 433. Quoted in TSR, 44.

[140] While Adorno is not completely explicit, arguably he is referring to a distance that makes the observer disregard the object as a source of pleasure, or as having an instrumental function. That is, it contemplates the object disinterestedly.

artwork unsettles whoever undertakes to engage with it to the point of letting the solidity of her or his beliefs, convictions, or certainties be shaken does the truth of art come into effect."[141] This is important given that, according to Adorno, modern subjectivity suffers from heteronomy. If, as Adorno seems to imply, art can allow the individual to perform a separation between its reified modes of perception and itself, it might be possible for it to gain a better comprehension of itself, of its state of alienation, even of its own needs. As I see it, this is part of the truth content of Adorno's aesthetic theory: the moment of aesthetic experience that *predates* interpretation. With Adorno, I hold on to the notion that the genuine aesthetic experience is one that allows individuals to take such a distance from, e.g., immediate needs, and even from the schematism imposed by the culture industry, and start developing one's own experiences.

Nevertheless, while Adorno would defend the value of the aesthetic experience, he is also clear that this experience does not amount to a true understanding of the artwork, and is therefore not sufficient to grasp its truth content. According to him, the "tangible and unmediated" can only take you half-way: "The demand of artworks that they be understood, that their content be grasped," Adorno writes, "is bound to their specific experience; but it can only be fulfilled by way of the theory that reflects this experience." (AT, 162) Hence why, according to him, "[a]esthetic experience is not genuine experience unless it becomes philosophy." (AT, 172) While for Adorno the knowledge of the work cannot come about without its experience, nor should the turn to philosophy be seen as the reduction of the experience to conceptual understanding, still, this experience—ephemeral—becomes empty without philosophical interpretation.[142] For Adorno, we could say, a genuine aesthetic

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[141] João Pedro Cachopo, 'Truth and Enigma: Adorno and the Politics of Art,' *New German Critique* 135, Vol. 45, No. 3, (November 2018): 83.

[142] The reference to Kant here is not accidental, and will return later when I discuss Kluge's own aesthetic production. Kluge, as we will see, solves differently this tension between 'conceptual' thought and 'intuitions.' See footnote 267

experience is one that *calls forth* philosophical reflection, and is realized *through* the latter. It is here that Adorno's aesthetic theory (despite all of its other virtues) becomes problematic when taken as an aesthetics that is intended to have a political impact.

This is because according to Adorno, it would not suffice for the receiver to 'get lost' in the work, separating herself from its presuppositions and assumptions about reality, and in doing so, allowing for an 'openness' of the subject toward its other—be it the social structures surrounding her, other subjects that might be in a similar (alienated) position, toward herself even. Added to this, Adorno demands that this openness triggers the interpretation of the work, and not any interpretation, but an 'adequate' one. Adorno cashes this out as the possibility to *objectively* 're-enact' the work from within. (AT, 161) What is more, to perform this re-enactment, Adorno believes the receiver should perform what appears as a contradictory task:

> He alone would understand music [or artworks generally] who hears with all the alienness of the unmusical and with all of Siegfried's familiarity with the language of the birds. (AT, 162)

Apprehending art's truth content through interpretation concerns, according to Adorno, opening up the historical dimension of what is man-made, contingent, but presents itself as a given.[143] To do so, however, one needs, Adorno argues, to, at one and the same time, immerse oneself in the work, and distance oneself from it—to get carried by its own demands, but also to deconstruct it by means of all of one's rational capacities. Only after interpretation through "the medium of conceptual

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above.

[143] Interpretation, Adorno writes, "is criticism of phenomena that have been brought to a standstill; it consists in revealing the dynamism stored up in them, so that what appears as second nature can be seen to be history." Theodor Adorno, *History and Freedom. Lectures 1964-1965*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), 134-135.

reflection" allows individuals to attain a full, unreduced experience. (ND, 13) This is problematic because Adorno is placing the stakes too high (who, after all, is suited to perform this contradictory task?) But this move introduces a *further* problem, related to his conception of the totalizing spell cast by reality. The problem is, in short, that Adorno's construal of the relation between experience and interpretation requires that the critic (or anyone looking to gain some knowledge from the work of art) be already (to an extent) 'outside' ideology, before even encountering or experiencing the work of art. Indeed, Adorno speaks of the *privilege* of experience: to attain a 'true' (as in full, unreduced) experience, one must already be in possession of its own critical capacities and of a historical and social awareness. It turns out that it is not only the artwork's autonomy that matters. In order to be able to make that autonomy 'speak,' the receiver must also be (to a greater or lesser extent) already autonomous.

Contrary to the claim that Adorno became something like an 'irrationalist,'[144] through the task of interpretation Adorno actually gives philosophy—and not just any philosophy, but one that operates through determinate negation—the upper hand. Understanding the work's truth "*in the highest sense*," he contends, "depends on a *spiritualization* of art and artistic experience." (AT, 162. My emphasis.) Crucially, this would not be akin to 'solving' the work, i.e. to opening up the secret behind the enigma. In a strong sense, there is no 'solution' (not in *this* historical reality, at least) since that solution would amount to reuniting the mimetic and the conceptual, and thus to the fulfilment of reconciliation. Nevertheless, Adorno is emphatic when stating that discursive reason can make such enigma concrete by giving reasons for its "insolubility." So while the task of the interpretation does not amount to performing a hermeneutical reading but to recuperating truth by comprehending their

144 Most prominently, it was Habermas who popularized the reading of Adorno as someone that puts all his hopes on 'mimesis' which he takes as a "piece of uncomprehended nature." (TCA, 382-383)

"incomprehensibility," Adorno concludes, this can only be done through theory. (AT, 157) Or as he otherwise writes, aesthetic truth can only be "fulfilled by way of the theory that reflects" upon experience. (AT, 162)

This shows something that will become important in Wellmer's critique (on which I focus on Chapter IV). For Adorno, if the truth of art were attached completely to its experience,

> then it would be lost to us forever and aesthetic experience itself would be in vain. It is because of this that works of art are dependent on 'interpretive reason', on the 'production of their truth content' through interpretation. (TSR, 6)

It turns out that the possibility of an 'adequate hearing' (or of an adequate experience, more generally), as Adorno calls it, has nothing 'spontaneous' about it, but rather depends on the possibility to 'spiritualize' or objectify the work through its interpretation. This contention by itself is not necessarily problematic, but does require us to question what exactly does the interpretation of the work require.

The claim becomes dubious once we remember that, for Adorno, not anyone is fit for performing this interpretation. According to him, only (some) professional artists or philosophers can achieve it.[145] Insofar as it depends on the correct reading of its import, the apprehension of aesthetic truth presupposes not only knowledge of musical analysis, but also of the history of art, and highly developed skills that are virtually not present in a society where the rule is the 'regressive' experience of art. The problem of a society where our experience and our capacities are pre-digested and spoon-fed by the culture industry thus returns with a vengeance, showing that not even the aesthetic experience—which apparently could allow us to transcend our state of reification, thus liberating our

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[145] See, e.g., Theodor Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, trans. E.B. Ashton, (New York: Continuum, 1976): 4-5.

repressed capacities—will suffice to fight off reification and the loss of autonomy. For Adorno, thus, to adequately perceive a work of art, it does not suffice to get momentarily lost in it, to let the work lead you without any prejudices. A high degree of skill (and thereby of privilege) are also demanded.

That for Adorno the possibility to grasp the truth of art depends on certain capacities that lie beyond the work is spelled out with clarity in *Negative Dialectics,* where Adorno claims that even if the truth of art is not reducible to conceptual (philosophical) understanding, "it is through such interpretation that the truth of the work unfolds." (ND, 14) Just as the formal law of the work of art is what gives sense to the spontaneous, mimetic moment of artistic production,[146] according to Adorno the intuitions that flash in aesthetic experience, while truth-bearing, cannot by themselves actualize such truth. For this, they require theoretical and conceptual mediation:

> … thought is no protector of springs whose freshness might deliver us from thinking. We have no type of cognition at our disposal that differs absolutely from the disposing type, the type which intuitionism flees in panic and in vain. (ND, 15)

Mimetic comportments or somatic impulses can *lead* to cognition, but are themselves *not forms of cognition*. These are so fleeting that they require interpretation to make them concrete. To use one of Kant's famous dictums: for Adorno the impulses emanating from experience are 'blind' without a formal framework to fit them in. The truth of art lies beyond the access of our present society, since it depends on an adequate 'interpretation' (in Adorno's technical sense) which, as we have seen, is not present for a reified consciousness.

Given that Adorno's social theory had told us that the subject of capitalism lacks that conceptual toolbox (i.e. those capacities for following the work and grasp its truth), the truth of art

[146] Here we are reminded of the idea of art as the spiritualization of mimesis. See Wellmer, TSR, 4-6.

becomes inaccessible to any but the very few lucky enough to have not only escaped the grasp of capitalism, but who also have knowledge of history, art, composition, and so forth.[147] Thus, art's truth loses its addressee, or, at the very least, the latter is reduced to a contingent factor which is not even able to communicate this truth—this addressee, thus, becomes politically insignificant. Detached from any social group that could actualize it, art's promise of reconciliation becomes empty.

Nevertheless, in this regards at least, we need not take Adorno at his word. Actually, commentators like Rüdiger Bubner have rightly argued that Adorno's reliance on the 'expert' as the subject of art gives his theory of aesthetic truth something artificial. For Bubner, the distinction Adorno makes between 'high' art and the 'art' of the culture industry cannot be made internally, and actually the separation of the sheep from the goats which Adorno sees as purely a matter of aesthetics turns out to be dependent on the interpretation of the 'expert,' which for its part relies on certain criteria that are never neutral. Thus, Adorno's account of an immanent interpretation is not completely free from prejudices or preconceptions, but, instead, relies on more than on the internal validity of the works. Those prejudices and preconceptions that the aesthetic experience should separate us from, end up returning through the back door—only now imposed from 'above,' i.e. by the expert critic or the astute philosopher.

Without, for example, knowledge of the history of music, the evaluation Adorno makes of Schoenberg as the most progressive musician of his time would not make sense. Without knowledge of the history of Western music, Schoenberg's atonal turn would not have much meaning. And actually, Adorno's own valuation of Schoenberg as objectively superior to, e.g. Igor Stravinsky, seems

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[147] Even the possibility to focus merely on your hearing, for example, as Negt and Kluge later contended, requires certain conditions of socialization that are not presently available for the majority of individuals. See PSE, 152; 267.

to depend on *his own* background and preference for a certain Austro-Germanic tradition.[148] In this vein, Middleton and DeNora have both contended, to give a further example, that Adorno's interpretation of Beethoven is biased, his valuation mediated by historical tropes and "the myths of compositional history."[149] This is important, because his interpretation of Beethoven sets the standards for all of Adorno's other valuations, from Schoenberg and Mahler, on one end, to Jazz music, on the other. As Middleton has argued, Adorno was unconsciously reproducing a dominant "Austro-German interpretation of nineteenth-century music history, which sets an over-privileged Viennese tradition at its normative centre."[150] This being the case, one wonders whether his dismissals of folk elements in 'high' music, or his lack of understanding of the role of some popular traditions, are not missing something.

I return to this issue in Chapters III and IV, but for now, suffice it to say that if one is to understand the social and political impact of those popular works, we need to stop assessing their success by measuring them against the musical quality of a certain School. This would foreclose the possibility that many individuals 'make something' progressive from their musical or aesthetic experiences, something that goes against the grain of the development of an oppositional consciousness within many social movements. The knowledge and capacities required in Adorno's concept of interpretation would thus preclude the possibility that a *reified* consciousness undoes its reification, i.e. that the subject is able to discover the world anew.

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[148] Both Wellmer, and Peter Bürger, for example, make this point. See Albrecht Wellmer, 'Sobre Negatividad y Autonomía del Arte,' in *Lineas de Fuga de la Modernidad*, trans. Peter Storandt Diller, (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2013); and Peter Bürger, 'The Decline of the Modern Age,' *Telos* 62, (1984): 117-130.

[149] Tia DeNora, *After Adorno. Rethinking Music Sociology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 27.

[150] Richard Middleton, *Studying Popular Music*, (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1990), 41.

In sum, the problem with Adorno's subsuming of the emancipatory power of art to the possibility to interpret its truth content—which for its part is reduced to the work's import—is that it presupposes that only those individuals that are privileged (and thus enjoy more autonomy than what is socially available) can be affected by such power. Art was supposed to be 'political' when it helped constitute autonomy, but in Adorno's theory, it turns out that this political impact rather *presupposes* autonomy. As I see it, if we do not want to throw all of Adorno's important insights overboard, then there are at least two things that we can do, and which I explore in further chapters.

One could begin by problematizing Adorno's account of modern subjectivity and his totalizing understanding of reification. This would allow to expand the scope of subjects upon which aesthetic experiences can have an impact. Negt and Kluge pursue this avenue by presenting a different account of the constitution of the subject, something that allows us to see elements of resistance within even the most oppressed individuals, and thus much more possibilities for resistance than Adorno could account for. One could also problematize the role that those 'avant-garde' intellectuals (those that enjoy certain privilege) must play vis-à-vis society. Here, both in the case of artists and intellectuals, it might just turn out that these individuals have a responsibility with those not-so-lucky subjects, and that they need to go beyond aesthetic and philosophical critique. Negt and Kluge also intervene in this debate, calling intellectual labourers to produce ideas and aesthetic objects that can truly further the autonomy of the oppressed many. (Adorno's own interventions as a public figure show that his persona was not strictly aligned with his theoretical impasses).

As I argue in following chapters, if art is to have a true 'political' role, that is, if it is to aid in the constitution of an autonomous consciousness and an autonomous experience, then the relation between aesthetic experience and interpretation—a relation where experience predates but is subsumed by the necessary skills and knowledge required for philosophical interpretation—must be inverted. With this, I mean that it must be possible to see the genuine aesthetic experience as a moment

that allows its subject to, in the first instance, expand its conceptual/discursive/expressive capacities through a questioning of its reified modes of behaviour and understanding. By allowing individuals to disclose the world anew, even if only fleetingly, the experience of the artwork can trigger a process where the subject attempts to comprehend that which is felt, sensed, but which cannot (yet) be expressed. It is this process which would allow the subject to, in due course, reappropriate its cognitive capacities.

By way of a conclusion, in what follows I highlight some moments where Adorno hinted toward this possibility.

III) Beyond Interpretation: The Emancipatory Role of Aesthetic Experience

"Artworks," Adorno argues, "exercise a practical effect, if they do so at all, not by haranguing but by the scarcely apprehensible transformation of consciousness" (AT, 316) Art, he says further on, is praxis, since it can cultivate consciousness. (AT, 317)[151] But as I have argued, there is something problematic in the way Adorno conceptualizes this function, since he relies on the work of interpretation, and thereby on the expertise of the judging subject.[152] The transformation of consciousness can only succeed, it would seem, for those in position to not need such transformation. But despite the shortcomings of Adorno's aesthetic theory (namely the limited understanding of the role of experience and its contradiction with his social philosophy), I want to resist reducing its truth content and throwing out the baby with the bathwater.

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151 "Subjectively, art requires self-exteriorization. . . this exteriorization is, however, practical insofar as it determines the person who experiences art and steps out of himself as a [*zoon politikon*] just as art itself is objectively praxis as the cultivation of consciousness; but it only becomes this by renouncing persuasion." (AT, 317)

152 See also, e.g. Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, 4.

To conclude this chapter, therefore, I show that in Adorno's work there are moments where the power of the aesthetic experience itself seems to come to the fore, without the need for expertly skilful interpretation. And while he does not regard aesthetic experience to be at the level of philosophical interpretation (and thus would not amount to apprehending art's truth content), his reflections do hint toward a way in which the experience itself can trigger a play of cognitive faculties and generate the conditions of possibility for critical thought. I focus in particular on one of his latest essays, '*Vers une musique informelle*,' which was written after his experiences with the post-serial music of figures like Pierre Boulez or John Cage—music that seemed to elude Adorno's preconceptions as a music critic. Adorno's own reaction to this experience of incomprehensibility is enlightening vis-à-vis the 'consciousness raising' role of an aesthetic experience can have—a role, what is more, that is independent of the comprehension of the history, form, or coherence of the work.

In his essay on '*musique informelle'* Adorno acknowledges the difficulty he encountered when trying to transcend the limits of his own experience—in short, the post-serial music of the 1960s, appeared to his ears as inaccessible, as nonsense. Because of this, he accepts, he was tempted to fall into the attitude of "resisting at all costs everything which remains inaccessible to one's own experience or at least one's primary, basic reactions."[153] Could it be, he asks, "that the countless composers of music that can only be understood with the aid of diagrams and whose musical inspiration remains wholly invisible to me can really all be so much more musical, intelligent and progressive than myself"?[154] Not being able to reconstruct these compositions as he listens to them, he is tempted to

[153] Theodor Adorno, 'Vers une musique informelle,' in *Quasi una Fantasia. Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 2011), 269.

[154] Adorno, 'Vers une musique informelle,' 269.

discard them: what truth could these bring, if Adorno's own theoretical framework does not suffice to read off their truth?

Ultimately, Adorno came to acknowledge this music as the paradigm of what truly modern music should strive for—a music that is not only the bearer of a truth content, but is also concerned with a true consciousness.[155] '*Musique informelle'* is described in this vein as "a music which takes the composer by surprise, much as can be surprised by the new substance in his test-tube." He further clarifies that future music, modelled upon it, should be music "whose end cannot be foreseen in the course of production."[156] This music, which he initially found puzzling, impenetrable, ends up being praised for the way its objectivity manages to pierce the subject, going *through* it, not towards it. It was the experience of the puzzle, the enigma, and *not* its interpretation, which triggered Adorno to go beyond his preconceptions, and led him to find the 'truth' of this music. Arguably, it was the moment of alienation, of incomprehension, which, in this case, was the bearer of truth.

In this essay, Adorno's comments on music approach something akin to what Bubner describes as the 'true nature of art,' which

> consists in its capacity to stimulate thought without restricting it and to bring reflection to a level of independence where it is no longer bound to concepts. Because it loosens reflection's ties to specifically determined cognitive functions, only the type of art that is capable of initiating the free play of reflection can do without the services of thought.[157]

Adorno's own experience of surprise in encountering something that transcended his own preconceptions invites us to remember one of the central tenets of his negative dialectics and of his

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[155] Adorno, 'Vers une musique informelle,' 320.

[156] Adorno, 303.

[157] Bubner, 'Concerning the Central Idea of Adorno's Philosophy,' 169.

aesthetic theory, namely, the need for the subject to remain open to its 'other,' or to what he calls the non-identical. For Adorno, through this surprise, the subject—being pulled out from congealed and pre-given categories, from externally imposed laws turned into second nature—is able to experience reality differently. In this case, the work of art, by triggering a play of capacities, acquires a different function which contrasts and complements the preservation of a 'truth' within its formal construction. In the former, it suffices that the work manages to 'move' the spectator, causing an unexpected reaction, showing what was taken for granted under a different guise.

Crucially, the truth moment lies in that *provocation* toward reflection, and not in the 'correct' results of the latter. But if an aesthetic experience can generate this without relying on its formal aspects (which would only work by way of expert interpretation), can it not be possible that many more cultural objects than Adorno allowed for—insofar as they, too, provoke this sense of the unfamiliar, of the enigmatic or new—have an emancipatory power? And is it not the case that, for the non-instructed receiver, something that touches upon *his or her own lived experiences* will be better able to trigger a thought process than a hermetic and formalist work of autonomous art?

Adorno did not theorize the full implications of the power of aesthetic experiences, something that was partly due to the way he understood society and the pervasiveness of a 'regressive listening,' and partly to his insistence on the corrupted nature of non-autonomous works. To grasp the full extent of the power contained in the aesthetic experiences, therefore, we must find a plausible alternative to Adorno's philosophical account of 'reified' subjectivity, as presented in the first section of this chapter. This is something that Negt and Kluge attempt to do. It is to their work that I now turn, before addressing what, from their perspective, appears as the political role of the aesthetic. As I argue, Negt and Kluge provide an alternative construal of the subject, and a different understanding of the limits of capitalism. This allows them to contend that, even when societies have been commodified, and when individuals have been heteronomously socialized, they can still have their own experiences when

confronted by aesthetic objects. What is more, this also allows them to construe the possibility to 'make sense' of those experiences. For Negt and Kluge, the skills and capacities which Adorno deems necessary to grasp aesthetic truth are precisely what the reception of the artwork enables one to recover—it is this process of recovery which, for them, makes art socially significant.

Chapter II: Negt and Kluge's History and Obstinacy: The Persistence of Resistance

In the previous chapter, I argued that a gap in Adorno's theory emerges from his accounts of the modern subject—as shaped through the culture industry and the logic of capitalism—and of the emancipatory power of art. According to Adorno's work, on the one hand, the process whereby the subject is constituted—driven by the need for self-preservation—ties rationalization to reification, leading to a state of generalized regression and, as he constantly emphasizes, to the virtual extinction of the autonomous individual.[158] In the present situation, the choices are "incomprehensibility and inescapability," and between them, there is no room for the 'individual,' Adorno writes.[159] On the other hand, Adorno's aesthetic theory locates the emancipatory power of the aesthetic—which consists in the furthering of autonomous thought—in the possibility to correctly interpret the truth of the artwork's import. The interpretation of such truth, however, demands of individuals certain capacities and skills that, according to his account of regression, they *do not* have.

It transpires that, in Adorno's work, apprehending the emancipatory power of art presupposes a type of (autonomous) subjectivity that, according to his own diagnosis, is virtually inexistent. Even conceding to Adorno that certain individuals *still* possess the capacities and skills that permit them to interpret the truth content of art, this is a contingent factor that has no substantive weight to ground the constitution of a 'global subject.' With the possibility for this subject to come together foreclosed, and in view the powerlessness of the 'old' autonomous individual—to whom the emancipatory power

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[158] See, e.g. Adorno, 'On the Fetish Character in Music,' in *The Culture Industry*, 35, where he speaks of the "liquidation of the individual."

[159] Adorno, 'On the Fetish Character in Music,' 35.

of art is (impotently) addressed[160]—Adorno's (political) philosophy cannot provide much justification for a radical social change.

The aim in this chapter is beginning to reconstruct Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge's work by focusing on their account of labour capacities and the constitution of the subject. I present this as an attempt to build on Adorno's work and to go beyond certain impasses therein—in particular, Adorno's impossibility to account for collective forms of resistance, and his limited understanding of the emancipatory power of the aesthetic. Negt and Kluge, I suggest, take Adorno's work as a starting point, and assert with him that "the commodity form has penetrated all spheres of social life."[161] However, Negt and Kluge's account of the formation of the subject does not rely, like Adorno's, on a dialectic where reification and rationalization are always tied together, but on a repeated process of separations and (re)appropriations. This allows them to argue that there cannot be a total integration of the subject by the logic of capitalism. The *possibility* to resist this logic, and thus to become autonomous, is created by capitalism itself and, therefore, cannot be eradicated.

In order to reconstruct Negt and Kluge's account of what I call the 'persistence of resistance,' in this chapter I focus on two shifts introduced in *History and Obstinacy*. The first is their reconceptualization of the subject, which is presented as a not yet unified entity, but a set of what they call 'labour capacities,' through which the subject relates to the world. If these are to function properly, Negt and Kluge contend, they must develop by respecting an 'internal balance economy'. These concepts, central to Negt and Kluge's 'negative' anthropology, are explained below. The second shift is their understanding of capitalism as a *persisting* process of 'primitive accumulation' fuelled by the

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160 See, e.g., Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 15-16: "the overwhelming objectivity of historical movement in its present phase consists so far only in the dissolution of the subject."

161 See Bowie, '*Geschichte und Eigensinn,*' 184.

appropriation of human properties and capacities. These shifts are predicated on the contention that the human subject is not merely driven by self-preservation. Rather, as a materially-grounded being, it also follows internal processes which are 'self-regulating,' i.e. which tend toward balance or harmony (a balance which, for Negt and Kluge, is sought at the physical, psychical, and social levels.) Disturbing those processes, Negt and Kluge contend, is what causes alienation, but it also produces a counter-reaction—an attempt to restore that balance.

Negt and Kluge's critique of capitalism, I argue, builds upon this dialectic between self-regulation and appropriation: Every act of capitalist appropriation or integration of the subject's capacities, insofar as it is geared by the imperative for efficiency and maximization of profit, interrupts the self-regulation of the subject. But for Negt and Kluge, the 'exploitative potency' of capital gives rise to a 'generative and combinatory potency,' which resides within humans' basic material structures. (HO, 82-83)[162] 'Obstinacy,' the name they give to this potency, is interpreted as a 'sense of self' that emerges as a somatic, unconscious reaction when subject-object relations are ruptured, and when subjective capacities are tapped in by an external law. Within this reaction—a resistance to being shaped heteronomously—lies the possibility to become aware of alienation, Negt and Kluge contend, and therefore to develop an autonomous consciousness.

Before moving forward, let me clarify the way I use the term 'alienation' in relation to Negt and Kluge's work.[163] I use the term 'alienation' (which Negt and Kluge use but never explicitly define) in reference to a process of separation and its (failed, interrupted) overcoming, i.e., to the failed (re)appropriation of that which the subject was separated from. 'Alienation' points, therefore, also to

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162 Langston, 'Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge,' 325. See also HO, 83.

163 So far 'alienation' has been intuitively used to convey a feeling of meaninglessness (and the conditions that produce it).

a disturbed, broken relation between self and world, where the subject has no command over oneself and over its own context of living. The individual, for example, objectifies its powers in the world (in culture, in social institutions, in commodities) but cannot appropriate these autonomously—it cannot see itself reflected in the products of its labour. Another contemporary example of alienation is mentioned by Negt: the gap between the wealth of communicative potentials offered by technology and the 'culture industry' today, and the impoverished use (the majority of) individuals can give them.[164] Hence, 'alienation' also conveys the impossibility for one's capacities to unfold freely and autonomously, allowing the individual to reach self-realization. In the words of Rahel Jaeggi:

> the concept of alienation concerns itself with the complex conditions of "linking" one's actions and desires (or, more generally, one's life) with oneself, "counting them as due to" oneself, or making them "one's own."[165]

Notably, if there is a psychological element to the concept, then, this has to do with the sense of meaninglessness, with the impossibility to gain an awareness of one's conditions, that arises within the subject from that disturbed relation between self and world, subject and object. 'Alienation,' in sum, points to both the objective, structural conditions that disturb the circuit of diremption-appropriation; and to the subjective experience of a short-circuit, of a loss of meaning, and crucially, to the impossibility to see reality as the product of one's labour.

In section I, I present Negt and Kluge's account of 'subjectivity' as constituted of labour capacities, shaped and formed through social and historical processes of 'separation,' but which retain in them a sense of balance, a tendency toward self-regulation (the meaning of those terms will be

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[164] Negt, in 'The History of Living Labor Power,' 59.

[165] Rahel Jaeggi, *Alienation*, trans. Frederick Neuhouser and Alan E. Smith, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 35.

clarified throughout the section). In section II, I focus on Negt and Kluge's understanding of capitalism, and on the specific way it performs separations. Their contention is that capitalism is a persisting process of accumulation, which disturbs the self-regulation of subjects' capacities, i.e. their inner sense of balance, and in doing so produces obstinate reactions. This allows Negt and Kluge to argue that, even within capitalism, the potential for resistance cannot be eradicated.

I end the chapter by referring to some potential problems which emerge from an account that grounds the possibility of resistance (and therefore of autonomy) on a spontaneous, unconscious reaction (section III). As I argue, because of this 'unconscious' status, obstinacy does not necessarily turn into critical forms of protest or resistance—as an abstract and subjective reaction, it lacks political *orientation* and can therefore be ideologically manipulated. While protest energy is persistent, I conclude, its political impact is ambivalent. The need to find balance can make individuals 'cheat' themselves to endure an alienating reality, or to reproduce an alienating social structure, just as it can become the source of critique and awareness. This is why the culture industry, for example, is so effective—something that I explore in detail in the following chapter. How to make this 'obstinacy' (this irreducible source of protest energy) useful for an emancipatory project is the subject of the upcoming chapters.

I) Labour Capacities. Self-Regulation. Protest Energy.

According to Adorno, the history of subjectivity leads to the constitution of a very specific type of subject: one that becomes unified at the price of the repression of its drives, instincts, and desires; a subject that, for the sake of control and self-preservation, forgets its own goals and becomes trapped in its own rationalized system. This construal—as it has been pointed out by commentators like

Albrecht Wellmer, Andreas Huyssen, or, most notably, by Jürgen Habermas,[166]—is one where the process of subjectification is tied to reification, and necessarily leads to pessimistic conclusions regarding the possibility of social change. To counter Adorno's conclusions while holding to his insistence on the need for rational and collective action, it is necessary to refute his account of the 'death' or 'emptying' of subjectivity, and justify (at the very least) the possible emergence of a social agent that—contrary to the mere existence of isolated critics—can allow us to conceive of a radical social change. This, I argue, is what Negt and Kluge's work attempts to do.

Negt and Kluge's point of departure is Adorno's contention that modern societies have been commodified through and through. But for Negt and Kluge, justifying this by appealing to a notion of a 'rationalization' triggered by an instinct for self-preservation is limited. Humans, according to Negt and Kluge, labour for more than self-preservation: they also labour for the attainment of an inner sense of harmony, for the sense of community and cooperation, for the sense of having "a ground on [which to] stand." (HO, 82) All of these are sought and necessary for self-fulfilment.[167] But if this is the case, what happens when their labour becomes alienated? What motivates the subject, reduced to labour power, to keep on working? How does the subject develop its capacities and

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[166] Andreas Huyssen, 'Adorno in Reverse: From Hollywood to Richard Wagner,' *New German Critique*, No. 29 (Spring-Summer 1983): 16: "[Adorno and Horkheimer] collapse the economic structure of society with the psychic dismantling of the individual, and again a form of closure prevails. Emptied subject and totality immobilize each other. The world appears frozen into nightmare." Wellmer, similarly, speaks of a dialectic of "subjectivization and reification," (TSR, 3). See also Habermas, TCA, 380-381.

[167] Negt, in 'The History of Living Labor Power,' 35. In this vein, Negt and Kluge thus contain that the human being has intrinsic capacities to make distinctions. In this vein, Kluge states: "It is constitutive of human beings and our species that we can distinguish between hot and cold, between what attracts me and what repels me, between what we will gladly watch and what we cannot bear to see, between a shimmering glow and the first face of my parents that I register inside me, between internal and external images—in short, between a thousand things and one." (Hopf, 'Feelings can Move Mountains,' 243.)

experience its reality? According to Negt and Kluge, there must be more than an instinct for self-preservation within the subject, and if we are to understand how it is possible to resist the commodifying logic of capitalism, we must unearth what this '*more*' consists of. But to do this, they contend, it is not enough to explore society through categories like commodity production, or focus on economic crises and social contradictions. We must rather turn to the contradictions *within* the subject *qua* living labour, as Negt argues.[168]

What is the living counter-pole of capital, Negt and Kluge thus ask? What is the "other, human side of political economy"?[169] It is the attempt to understand this subject—constructed and structured *within* capitalism—which guides Negt and Kluge's *History and Obstinacy*. But how can we study this 'labouring subject' which never had a stable psychological or social position (i.e. that was never a subject in-itself, as the bourgeoise was) but, rather, has endured a history of exploitation of its labour and capacities, and the appropriation of its material and psychical properties?[170] Given that the subject of capitalism is fragmented, and that its labouring capacities as a human being "[remain] unconnected," (PSE, 296) Negt and Kluge propose to study those capacities, something that, nevertheless, requires an understanding of the human body, of human's 'essential powers,' (Marx) and of their historical genesis. For Negt and Kluge, these capacities are what allow the subject to labour, and thus what makes it possible to either endure or resist its alienated forms.

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[168] Negt, in 'The History of Living Labor Power,' 36.

[169] Fore, 'Introduction,' 22.

[170] Property [*Eigentum*], as Jameson notes, is a central concept and denotes for Negt and Kluge 'what belongs to me or us,' what is *proper*, and is also what is appropriated by capitalist separations, as we will see in more detail. (Jameson, 'On Negt and Kluge,' 163.) This is both what constitutes the subject of capitalism as a fragmented, incomplete subject, and what gives it 'obstinacy,' or *Eigensinn*: a sense of self, of belonging.

Negt and Kluge's *Public Sphere and Experience* already pointed toward the need to focus on the properties and capacities (the particular needs, interests, and fantasies) that constitute the subject, and on how their appropriation and fragmentation affects its experience of and its navigation through reality, including the means it acquires to respond to capitalism. This, according to them, is a better path to unearth the possible constitution of an autonomous subject and of collective action than focusing on the labouring subject as a cohesive, pre-given whole.[171] Only in this way, they argue, can critical theory be able to understand the contradictory nature of the labouring subject, and thus reconsider whether subjectivity has been so thoroughly co-opted.[172]

Why, for example, can a member of the labour party spend its evenings consuming the products of the culture industry? How come a feminist—claiming to struggle for justice and emancipation—discriminate transgender women? Conversely: How come so many social movements have emerged, and have rejected the logic of capitalism? How can we account for the fact that feminists, Black activists, the LGBTQ community have resisted the normalization of that same logic? Where does the energy of a textile worker to engage in alienating and menial labour come from? Aren't people around the globe showing signs that (however unconsciously) they cannot be reduced to 'cogs' in the machine? Do not these signs show that people are not so easily coerced?

Negt and Kluge's *History and Obstinacy* can be read as an attempt to answer these questions by reconstructing the opposite, living pole of the capitalist economy—its 'subjective side.' To do this,

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[171] The failure to realize that the laboring subject is not (yet) constituted as a whole is one of the reasons why traditional forms of organization have failed to articulate people's interests and thus to act collectively. It is a mistake, Negt argues, "to categorize individual members . . . as totalities, as Social-Democrats, Communists, or class conscious proletarians." Oskar Negt, 'Don't Go By Numbers, Organize According to Interests! Current Questions of Organization,' *New German Critique*, No. 1, (Winter, 1973): 48.

[172] Negt, in 'The History of Living Labor Power,' 36.

Negt and Kluge construct what they call a 'political economy of labour power,' i.e. an economy that describes the circuits of production, consumption, and the movements, *not* of capital itself, but of what capitalism appropriates: namely, subjective energies and capacities. In short, Negt and Kluge use the Marxist tools to study the subject of capitalism. (HO, 120)[173] But if the commodity is the building block of the capitalist economy, the building blocks of the capitalist subject, they contend, are people's 'essential powers.' That is, the capacitates and properties, the skills, interests and needs which allow them to perform labour and creative activity, and which capitalism appropriates.[174] Within capitalism, they argue, those powers constitute a 'second (living) economy': a circuit *within* the worker itself, and whose processes of separation, appropriation, and re-appropriation shape it *qua* subject. (HO, 122-123)

Negt and Kluge focus on the impact that capitalism has on the psychic and material structures of its subjects, which become the object of their study, in order to understand what happens to the "life-process of human beings" when their properties confront them in an alienated manner, and to elucidate the possibilities open for subjects to respond to capitalism.[175]

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[173] According to them, Marx focused on the commodity form, from which he was able to understand the contradictory structures of capitalism, but Marx himself never used this approach for the study of the subject. "We begin with a simple observation: We clearly possess an elaborate theory of the political economy of capital: Marx's Capital. The polar opposite of this would be a political economy of labor power, for which no theoretical groundwork has ever been laid." (HO, 120)

[174] As Stewart Martin notes, by alluding to these 'essential powers' Negt and Kluge remind us that the separation between 'labour power' and 'labour' is a product of historical circumstances. See Stewart Martin, 'Political economy of life. Negt and Kluge's History and Obstinacy,' *Radical Philosophy* 190, (March-April 2015): 27.

[175] See 'The History of Living Labor Power,' 37 and HO, 120.

I.1 The Second Economy and Labour Capacities

To understand Negt and Kluge's account of the constitution of the subject of capitalism, it is useful to contrast it with Marx's understanding of the genesis of the proletariat. According to Marx, the proletariat emerged from the "historical caesura" of primitive accumulation—that event that separated the workers from the means of production, making them doubly-free. I return to the relevance of primitive accumulation for Negt and Kluge below. What is important to note here is that, for Marx, in a first sense, this event makes the worker free because he "can dispose of his labour-power as his own commodity."[176] In a second sense, the worker also becomes free since "he has *no other commodity for sale*, is short of everything necessary for the realisation of his labour-power."[177] When farmers, peasants, workers, and so forth, were deprived of their property, that is, they were left with nothing more than their labour power (i.e. their capacity to work), which they then had to sell in exchange for a wage. Those dispossessed individuals could, henceforth, enter into a relation of exchange with the owner of the means of production, something that, for Marx, defines them as 'proletarian.'

While Negt and Kluge rely on the basis of Marx' account, they contend that it fails to tell us anything about the motivations or the interests of the worker—of how, for example, those individuals' experiences of their life-contexts changed after that appropriation. What is missing, thus, is an account of the process as it transpires within or impacts the subject. Why didn't the workers fight back, and refuse to enter into this relation? Or did they? And how does the separation from the means of production change the self-relation of these individuals? Do workers experience the world just as they did when they related more directly to their own labour? Do they do it in the same way than the owner

[176] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1*, in *Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels Collected Works*, vol. 35, (New York : International Publishers, 2004), 179.

[177] Marx, *Capital, Vol. 1,* 179. My emphasis.

does? In Marx's account, the workers' experiences are not explored, and hence the work that the subject must perform on itself in order to work for capital is taken for granted. Hence why Marx, for example, could assume that the proletariat was "making its way [toward emancipation] according to hard-and-fast historical rules."[178] Hence why, too, many of these questions are left unanswered. But, Negt and Kluge contend, if the proletarian is not assumed as a synthetic whole, then to understand how emancipation might be possible we need to ask: "How do the 'essential powers' of humans come into being, so that we are able to work, control our own lives, and become autonomous?" (HO, 73)

Providing an answer is crucial, since without understanding the specific way needs, motivations, or interests of the worker are constructed, or by failing to comprehend how specific skills, attitudes, and capacities come into being, critical theory will not be able to account for the possibility for subjects to, as they put it above, control their own lives and become autonomous.[179] This motivates their turn from an analysis of the wage relation to that of the worker's *internal relations*—how it relates to its own motivations, needs, interests, capacities—but also of the relationship to its 'property.' Crucially, Negt and Kluge use the term 'property' to refer not only to their possessions, but to what Jameson describes as the workers' 'place and space and [their] relationship to what Marx called the "body of the earth."'[180]

With this turn, Negt and Kluge realize that the relationship between labourer and owner depends on another relation: that between the worker and its capacity to work. The labourer works for capital, they contend, but she also works on herself, something necessary to "engender within

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178 Oskar Negt, 'What Is a Revival of Marxism and Why Do We Need One Today?,' in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, (Hampshire: Macmillan Education, 1988), 223.

179 It is no coincidence that this reminds us of Horkheimer's formulation regarding human beings as "producers of their own historical form of life." (See Horkheimer, 'Postscript,' 244 in footnote 83 above).

180 Jameson, 'On Negt and Kluge,' 163.

[herself] the aptitude for [her] labor." (HO, 124) For the workers, they argue, two forms of labour are taking place where apparently there is only one: labour that produces capital, but also labour that *produces the capacity or aptitude* to work for capital.[181] In order to sell their labour power, this labour power must, in the first place, be produced:

> ... when an exchange is finished for the owner of money, a twofold form of work begins for the owner of the capacity to work, i.e. for 'labour power' (Marx). [She] works for capital, and [she] performs work on [herself] in order to engender within [herself] the aptitude for [her] labor. (HO, 124)

This means that, alongside the capitalist economy, there is another (internal) economy at work—a process "transpiring within labour power itself" (HO, 123)—which follows a logic that has nothing to do with how capitalism operates.[182] It turns out that the possibility for the capitalist appropriation of the workers' labour power depends on the possibility for the labouring subjects to *produce* labour power, i.e. to produce themselves *as* workers. The subjects of capitalism are, thus, not the product of one but of two economies.

Importantly, while the dimensions of 'non-productive' or 'reproductive' labour, like childcare, domestic labour, and other forms of work that have become prominent in feminist literature *are* important for Negt and Kluge, these are not the focus of their account.[183] The 'productive'/'reproductive' distinction relates to the wage (or lack thereof) received for the work performed, as well as to the disregard and exploitation of (re)productive labour, necessary for the

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[181] Martin, 'Political economy of life,' 28.

[182] As Andrew Bowie has noted, "the *production* of the commodity sold—labor-power—has nothing directly to do with how it is evaluated in capitalism." Bowie, '*Geschichte und Eigensinn*,' 184.

[183] This dimension becomes more prominent in their discussion of counter-public spheres, discussed below in chapters V and VI. See, e.g., footnote 521 below.

reproduction of capital. But it does not yet account for the inner labour performed on oneself that allows the subject to work for capital (regardless of whether there is a wage involved). Negt and Kluge, instead, refer to an "inner relation of labor power with itself." (HO, 123)

It is through such self-labour, Negt and Kluge contend, that the subject *qua* labour power is produced. What is engendered through this self-labour are 'labour capacities,' i.e. the capacities that allow the subject to perform creative, productive activity. Negt and Kluge, thus, refer to something within the *subject* akin to what Hölderlin calls the "creative force" that makes possible the "art and activity" of humans.[184] Negt and Kluge's 'second economy,' that is, is an *internal* economy—constituted by the subjects' structures, motivations, drives, and capacities; by the abilities, feelings, forces that allow them (*qua* living labour) to act, to think, to create, to perceive the world around them.[185]

Marx had already pinpointed the relevance of labour for the subject's sense of self, and as a way to constitute one's own identity, and, hence, could argue that capitalism was a source of alienation. Indeed, the subject constitutes itself through its work—and on this, Negt and Kluge follow Marx's account. But according to them, Marx failed to see the centrality of the "labor process transpiring *within* labor power itself," a process that takes place in order to motivate or convince oneself to perform capitalist work at all. (HO, 123. My emphasis) For example, workers must control their drives or impulses against pleasure and gain the disposition (the discipline necessary) to work—they must convince themselves that the delayed satisfaction is worth it. For Negt and Kluge, therefore, the contradictions of capitalism go beyond the exploitation of labour, the crisis cycles, the circuit of capital

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[184] Hölderlin, in Bowie, '*Geschichte und Eigensinn*,' 185.

[185] Negt and Kluge thus find support for this interpretation from Marx himself. They draw largely from the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* and the *Grundrisse*. See Christopher Pavsek, 'Negt and Kluge's Redemption of Labor,' *New German Critique*, No. 68, (Spring – Summer 1996): 146.

circulation as expressed socio-economically—these are reflected just as much in the just as contradictory 'economy' of the subject.

By turning the focus away from exchange, instrumental labour, obedience, ideological manipulation; and toward the processes transpiring *inside* the subject, Negt and Kluge unearth a 'self-regulative economy of drives'—an organization of drives, feelings, motivations, dispositions, and skills which sustains the subject, insofar as it establishes "the equilibrium that is necessary for survival."[186] It is the self-regulating processes, furthermore, that allow the subject as labour power to either engage with (and thus help reproduce) capitalism, or push against its alienating forms of labour. (HO, 124-125)

I.2 Self-Regulation

Negt and Kluge's shift toward the subject of capitalism allows them to speak of two economies: one where labour power is seen as a commodity which can be exchanged, and another where the subjects rear their capacity to labour and thus constitute themselves as *living* labour power. The capitalist logic that regulates the first economy is one geared toward efficiency, productivity, constant expansion, growth. This economy can function as such because of the way it reduces every object to its common denominator. Everything in it becomes a commodity which can be exchanged for money; reality and experience are structured in a purely technical, means-ends rationality. In contrast, the internal economy that regulates the subject, Negt and Kluge contend, follows principles of measure rooted in its material, and libidinal energy. (HO, 123)

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[186] Fore, 'Introduction,' 24.

What Negt and Kluge mean is that humans (as living, material beings) have characteristics, needs, drives that they seek to satisfy in order to survive—these circuits of need-satisfaction are described by Negt and Kluge as self-regulating processes. For example, we eat when hungry, seek to avoid pain, and look for shelter when we feel cold. These processes, what is more, are usually not compatible with the logic of capitalism (with the demand for surplus production, for efficiency, to act instrumentally.) Once we are satiated, the tendency is to stop eating. A worker, to give another example, *by its own will*, does not work itself to death or deprive itself of sleep.[187] In this regard, Marx had already highlighted the tension (central for what follows) between the living labourer and capital, an automatic machinery that functioned independently of the needs of the labourers:

> [Capital] would go on producing forever, did it not meet with certain natural obstructions in the weak bodies and the strong wills of its human attendants. The automaton, as capital, and because it is capital … is therefore animated by the longing to reduce to a minimum the resistance offered by that obstinate yet elastic natural barrier, man.[188]

Below, I come back to this tension between humans' self-regulation and capitalism's logic (that "industrial *perpetuum mobile*" as Marx calls it).[189] Before, let me clarify that, even if Negt and Kluge tend to speak of 'natural' forces, in their account those self-regulating processes are constituted *both* ontogenetically and phylogenetically. The subject acquires new needs and capacities through early

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[187] In this vein, Marx had already spoken in *Capital* of the limits to the working day, which he argued, were both physical and moral. Marx, *Capital Vol. 1*, 239: "Within the 24 hours of the natural day a man can expend only a definite quantity of his vital force. A horse, in like manner, can only work from day to day, 8 hours. During part of the day this force must rest, sleep; during another part the man has to satisfy other physical needs, to feed, wash, and clothe himself."

[188] Marx, *Capital, Vol. 1*, 406. Translation amended.

[189] Marx, 406.

processes of socialization, others in education; other capacities depend on its physical and genetic make-up; yet some others depend on the way they are constructed socially as certain types of subjects.[190] Thus, human beings learnt to walk, to communicate, to navigate their lifeworlds in certain socially constrained manners. This is why Negt and Kluge speak of a second 'social birth' in which we learn the codes of our 'social environment' and develop new characteristics. (HO, 113) These historical characteristics also function following a principle of self-regulation, but one much more fragile than that of the more 'natural' or primitive characteristics. This is because, in order for historical characteristics to develop, they must be built upon the older natural ones. Thus, for example, in order to teach a child to stand up, to talk, or to walk, some of its bodily processes must be disciplined—the desire for immediate gratification must therefore be repressed in order for the child to become "a willing working adult."[191]

Crucially, because within each subject there is a collection of properties that tends toward forms of organization that *in principle* have nothing to do with the capitalist economy, then shaping the subject so that it performs according to capitalist standards requires important amounts of internal labour (Negt and Kluge speak alternatively of a 'balance labour.') According to Negt and Kluge, violence and coercion alone cannot explain why, e.g., wage labourers manage to act in ways that push

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[190] For example, Iris Marion Young contends in a seminal essay that the feminine body is constructed through restrictions that make certain capacities (like throwing a ball) appear impossible, or harder than for men. See Young, 'Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility, and Spatiality,' in *On Female Body Experience. "Throwing Like a Girl" and Other Essays*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). In the introduction to that book, Young writes: "I conceive the feminine also as a set of normatively disciplined expectations imposed on female bodies by male-dominated society." (Young, 5) This process, we could say, is one that creates certain capacities we now associate with the 'feminine' and the 'masculine.'

[191] Here Negt and Kluge draw freely from both Foucault's notion of biopolitics as well as from Horkheimer's study on authority and the family. See, e.g., HO, 116; PSE, 21-22.

them to their psychical and bodily limits. Capitalism must be structured in such a way so that the subject 'convinces itself' that it is better to push beyond what feels satisfying, to exert itself to the point of burndown.

The central point for Negt and Kluge is that when subjects *do* force themselves to 'perform' or labour under those conditions that oppose their needs, drives, and their own bodily and psychological demands, the tendency toward self-regulation and balance will resist such changes, and thus produce an *obstinate* reaction. Subjective capacities and properties, as Martin puts it,

> … have a more or less powerful tendency to be oriented to what is proper to them; that is, to be self-regulating, autonomous and conservative. In other words, they have a tendency to be obstinate.[192]

What capitalism cannot avoid, then, is the obstinate counter-reaction that this generates in the subject, and which finds expression through bodily reactions and in the unconscious—i.e. as feelings of alienation, as a rejection of reality, a sense of meaninglessness, as fantasies and daydreaming.

It should be emphasized that Negt and Kluge are aware that today, those principles of measure are (with increasing frequency) not being observed. While principles of self-regulation are rooted in our material constitution and in our libidinal energies, capitalism has shown that it *can* force people to break them. Thus, people's 'obstinate' reactions can be bent or broken, leading to premature death, to physical and mental degradation.[193] Marx, for example, describes how railroad workers—who had seen the workday gradually expand—eventually collapsed, unable to do their jobs: "At a certain point

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[192] Martin, 'Political economy of life,' 30.

[193] In this vein, Negt and Kluge speak, e.g., of National Socialist labour camps. See HO, 102-103. See also Bowie, '*Geschichte und Eigensinn*,' 186-187, and Marx, *Capital, Vol. 1*, 275-276.

their labour power failed. Torpor seized them. Their brain ceased to think, their eyes to see."[194] Part of the process that takes place in the internal economy of the subject within a capitalist economy concerns making oneself disposed to work, even under alienating conditions that oppose even humans' most base (or natural) characteristics.

This reorientation of the workers' energies in ways that oppose their regular functioning requires what Negt and Kluge call a 'supplemental' or 'balance labour.' For example, the labour invested in consuming the products of the culture industry which (as we will see thoroughly in the next chapter) serve as an escape valve that (temporarily) restores the balance within subjects, allowing them to muster the motivation to keep on performing alienated labour. These historical characteristics (those that allow to push us further, to work without sleep), what is more, can become sedimented "as the result of previous dispositions to labour," as Martin writes, pushing back the more 'libidinal' or 'natural' characteristics and capacities.[195] As the subject of capitalism becomes ever-more instrumentalized, as it turns into an abstract entity called 'labour power,' their "originary self-regulated forces rooted in the libidinal economy shrink to a kind of solidified dead labor, a character machine." (HO, 123) This makes the counter-reaction increasingly abstract, increasingly 'blind' and arbitrary. But Negt and Kluge insist: these reactions cannot be completely repressed subjugated, or steered instrumentally.[196]

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[194] Marx, *Capital, Vol. 1*, 260. For a contemporary example of how overwork leads to such calamities, see Koji Morioka, "Working Hours in Contemporary Japan in the Context of Marx's Capital." http://marxinthe21stcentury.jspe.gr.jp/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/morioka_e_full.pdf.

[195] Martin, 'Political economy of life,' 30.

[196] If this were, hypothetically, to happen, individuals would not even reach what Negt and Kluge call in *Public Sphere and Experience* the 'emancipatory minimum' that capitalism requires to have functional workers.

I.3 A (Negative) Anthropology?

The above seems to imply that Negt and Kluge's work is built upon an anthropological premise, since the principle of self-regulation cannot be explained without the appeal to a material or natural substratum of the human being. Negt and Kluge do not shy away from this, and insist that there are some organic prerequisites necessary for the functioning of the human—which must, ultimately, eat, sleep, and find shelter from the cold, to give some simple examples. There are, as Negt therefore claims, "relatively constant, phylogenetic structures— for instance with respect to the organs with which human beings are equipped, or the basic features of the human psyche."[197] Similarly, Negt and Kluge speak of capacities geared toward "the satisfaction of human needs by real use-values," (PSE, 21) and in *History and Obstinacy*, they contend that there are certain basic human needs that are grounded in our materiality (the aforementioned needs for shelter, for food, for association). The principle of self-regulation, they write, "is a natural characteristic." (HO, 98) But how strong is this anthropological premise? How problematic is it?

As Devin Fore points out in his introduction to *History and Obstinacy*, Negt and Kluge's work follows (however loosely) some contentions from Freudian psychoanalysis (broadly conceived to include also figures like W. Reich, to whom they are highly indebted). Arguably, they are also indebted to Adorno's 'materialist' account of the somatic instincts and of the material basis of the human subject.[198] In this regard, their central premise is that human beings, while "lacking the concrete material resources necessary to survive out in the world," are equipped with libidinal drives, dependent on the subject's materiality, that push (if blindly) toward the satisfaction of such lacks.[199] This 'pushing

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[197] Negt, in 'The History of Living Labor Power,' 47.

[198] I return to this below, especially in the conclusions to this thesis. See Concluding Remark below.

[199] Fore, 'Introduction,' 25.

toward' satisfaction (or conversely *against* lack) is, we could say, the principle of self-regulation. For Negt and Kluge, in this minimal sense, there *is* a material substratum that underlies the human being, and which acts as a boundary for capitalist subjectification:

> *What* constitutes cells, how their environment poisons them, *what* the brain works out- these questions are subject to the influences of social nature. *How* they really function according to their own specific nature and the manner of their material construction, the answers to these questions have scarcely changed for millennia. (HO, 99. Emphasis in original.)[200]

"Neither knowledge nor want can oppose the brain's nature absolutely," Negt and Kluge write. (HO, 100) The attempt to do so, they contend, will necessarily produce an 'obstinate' reaction.

This does not mean, however, that we can tap into those material structures or recover them in a non-socialized form. Their 'materialist' claim about the limits imposed by the human subject is only intended to show that, even while an external logic can direct or orient our thoughts, some capacities and processes cannot be seamlessly determined by an external, heteronomous logic. Negt and Kluge's intention, thus, is not calling for a return to the true nature of the human, or to posit an ahistorical essence. This is impossible since, even while asserting the existence of certain universal features of the human being, those features, as they make clear, are always already socialized, shaped by history. (PSE, 57-58) Just as for Adorno, as Andrew Bowie notes, for Negt and Kluge 'nature' can only be understood in "terms of historically developed frameworks."[201] (Conversely, historical

[200] See also, e.g., PSE, 23-25.

[201] Andrew Bowie, 'Kluge and Negt 30 Years On,' in *Glass Shards: Echoes of a Message in a Bottle. Alexander Kluge-Jahrbuch, vol. 2*, (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2015), 79.

capacities can become sedimented, and function as objectively as what is usually understood as nature.)[202]

Negt and Kluge are, therefore, not postulating the logic of self-regulation in order to use it as an abstract or absolute principle that is to guide action. It is neither a principle that determines all of the achievements of humanity or the logic of history. Rather, it acts as something more akin to what Richard Langston, following Horkheimer, calls a 'negative anthropology,' that is, as a way to "[reveal] the inherent contradiction between the conditions of existence and everything that the great philosophies have postulated as a purpose."[203] The relevance of speaking of processes and capacities with 'their own nature,' with their own sense-of-self, then, is not to fix these transcendentally, but on the contrary, to expose the arbitrariness and contingency of a capitalist society that presents itself as a given, as 'natural.'

Crucially, in spite of the appeal to 'essential powers,' Negt and Kluge constantly emphasise that the human is a construction site. "The *forming* of the five senses is a labour of the entire history of the world down to the present," Negt and Kluge repeatedly emphasize, in line with Marx. (HO, 99) If Negt and Kluge repeat that a rational society would be one where human capacities—our 'essential powers'—can develop freely, then, this does not mean that these capacities would fulfil their essence or *telos*, but that humans would be able to use their powers (and thereby organize society) in a way that satisfies their self-assessed needs. It is *this* which would amount to overcoming alienation and reaching a state of self-realization. However, both the needs and the capacities which constitute the 'nature' of

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202 See ND, 359: 'it would be up to thought ... "to grasp historic being in its utmost historic definition, in the place where it is most historic, as natural being, or to grasp nature, in the place where it seems most deeply, inertly natural, as historic being."

203 Max Horkheimer, 'Remarks on Philosophical Anthropology,' in *Between Philosophy and Social Science: Selected Early Writings*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 157. See also Langston, *Dark Matter*, 108.

the human species need to be understood as historical products which unfold through time. Key is that such changes have to respect the boundaries of the human balance economy. These boundaries may change over history, but, at any specific point, they provide a 'negative' anthropological constraint on what can be done to human beings (including by themselves) without leading to breakdown or dysfunctionality.

Negt and Kluge, as noted already, are attempting to counter the pessimism that Adorno sometimes shows, and their construal of the 'internal economy' is key to comprehend how they seek to do so. Adorno, as we have seen, had contended that within late capitalism, even the 'archaic impulses' were conspiring to annihilate the subject, and whatever escaped capitalism's grasp was reduced to a mere curiosity.[204] Leaving aside the fact that Adorno was in this case perhaps deliberately exaggerating, and that he knew that this reduction had not yet happened, he did seem to believe that history was marching toward the eventual reduction of the living, human, beings, metamorphosing them into commodities and reducing "each of their impulses."[205] By appealing to the self-regulatory logic of capacities and human processes, Negt and Kluge would counter this claim, by pointing to a 'gap' in the logic of capitalism: a human being cannot be socialized, transformed into labour power, without respecting the "qualitative rhythms" of certain developmental processes.[206] Negt and Kluge would thus oppose Adorno's view. For them, human beings cannot *ever* be reduced completely into 'dead labour.'

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204 Adorno, 'Sociology and Psychology.' See footnotes 106 and 107 above.

205 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 229.

206 Those processes and capacities can be either biological, such as the temporality of a pregnancy or the relation between a child and its primary objects, or historical, such as the temporality of intellectual work, or the capacity to act 'responsibly,' to give some examples. See PSE, 19-20; 22-25.

In sum, the logic of self-regulation is not 'natural' in any ahistorical sense, nor is it a fixed, easily categorizable principle. It is rather intended to show that capacities and abilities developed in non-capitalist conditions (which can be understood in both its phylogenetical or ontogenetical dimensions) become sedimented in the make-up of the subject, as Jameson writes, and leave "traces and scars in layers on subjectivity and the body, on experience, and in history itself."[207] These create new needs, new interests, and the failure to satisfy them will produce alienation. For example, the temporality acquired by a child in primary experiences which has nothing to do with the capitalist mode of production can be suppressed by the unilinear, timeless succession of time as organized by capitalism.[208] But it lives on, dormant, under the surface—in fantasy, in the imagination, in somatic or apparently 'spontaneous' reactions. Those overlooked, undermined, or suppressed capacities can then recur or re-emerge, only to them be given a new use in later periods.[209] The attempt to completely instrumentalize them creates disturbances within the subject (a rupture to the self-regulating processes) who will then feel lost, alienated, forced to do something that 'feels wrong'—i.e. a sense of unrest, an obstinate reaction. Those reactions expose the historical nature of (social) reality. This does

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[207] Jameson, 'On Negt and Kluge,' 162.

[208] Negt and Kluge quote from Adorno's short study, '"Static" and "Dynamic" as Sociological Categories,' where Adorno writes: "As the distance between bourgeois rationality and feudal traditionalism increases, the methods of industrial production will be progressively rationalized. As a result, experience, time and memory will in the end be liquidated like an unnecessary mortgage." (Theodor Adorno, '"Static" and "Dynamic" as Sociological Categories,' in *Diogenes*, Vol 9, Issue 33, (1961): 42. See also PSE, 19.) In this vein, see also Moishe Postone's account of the transformation of cyclical conceptions of time into an 'abstract' temporality. Moishe Postone, *Time, Labour, and Social Domination. A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 200-211. See also Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996). There, Giddens discusses the changed structure of time and space in the transition between pre-modern, modern, and post-modern epochs.

[209] For Negt and Kluge "the suppression of fantasy is the condition of its freer existence in present society. One can prohibit the activity of fantasy, the spinning of a web around reality, as something unrealistic; but if one does this, it becomes difficult to influence the direction and mode of production of fantasy." (PSE, 34)

not mean, however, that the logic of capitalism itself cannot (to a certain extent) get sedimented in the body, shaping our behaviour or the way we experience reality. This is something to which I return below.

The way we 'immediately' experience the world, thus, has nothing of immediate, and according to Negt and Kluge is rather the product of a history of socialization of the human body and human experience. But this process has left traces in our current 'nature,' sedimented layers of (natural and historical) self-regulating capacities in our bodies, which grant the human the possibility to react to violence, to suffering.[210] This reaction contains the potential to change the conditions of oppression of our historical reality, but for this to happen, however, this material, unconscious force is not sufficient. That this potential is actualized in an emancipatory direction depends on whether this unconscious force will be monopolized by, e.g., the culture industry or the political right, or whether human beings will become able to 'make sense' of those reactions, and interpret them in ways that allows them to realize how the objectified social conditions dominate and control their productive potentials.

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What happens, for example, when 'proletarianized' workers are confronted with a reality that provides no ways to find meaning through the exercise of their capacities, through a free deployment of labour power? What happens, that is, when workers are forced to perform alienated labour for too long without reaping any sense of fulfilment? One of the most revealing and shocking examples is found in German history: the now infamous battle of Stalingrad (1942-1943). How come so many workers

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[210] In this vein Adorno writes in *Negative Dialectics*: "[The human] drags along with him as his social heritage the mutilations inflicted upon him over thousands of years." (ND, 124)

ended up marching for the National Socialist army and invading a country of which they knew little? How come they supported a cause that so directly opposed their interests?

This is something which Negt and Kluge have asked, and that became a recurring theme in Kluge's filmic and literary work.[211] The answer they give appeals to the sense of loss created by the expropriation of the property and capacities of thousands of peasants, which Negt Kluge trace back to the enclosures and the appropriation of land that had taken place since the twelfth century.[212] Those appropriations created needs (for community, for association, for a place to stand and work on) that the National Socialist regime tapped into. The ideological strength this regime gained, was for Negt and Kluge the result of a history of dispossession and loss. Those needs, those lacks, resulted in a break of these subject's sense of balance, in a distortion to their inner equilibrium. The National Socialist's appeals to 'earth,' to the '*Volk*,' to the *Lebensraum*, or the promises of 'meaning and totality' tapped into those needs that could not be satisfied within the current historical structures, and provided the (false) idea that their reality could, by supporting this new regime, become meaningful. (PSE, 174)

As described in Kluge's novel *The Battle*, by appropriating their needs and interests—to recover the land that had been appropriated—and their desire for autonomy (for *Eigen-Sinn*), Nazism could make 300,000 soldiers invade Stalingrad, leading them "into an area of the world . . . where not one of those men had any business to be."[213] The subjects' collective need to satisfy their lacks became a form of false-consciousness. As Andrew Bowie writes:

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[211] See e.g. Kluge's novel *Schlachtsbeschreibung: Der organisatorische Aufbau eines Unglucks,* (Munich: Wilhelm Goldmann Verlag, 1978). The novel is also translated as *The Battle*, by Leila Vennewitz, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967).

[212] See Bowie, '*Geschichte und Eigensinn*,' 187.

[213] Kluge, *Schlachtsbeschreibung*, 8. Quoted in Andrew Bowie, 'New Histories: Aspects of the Prose of Alexander Kluge,' *Journal of European Studies*, xii, (1982): 199.

> Centuries of continual deprivation of such individuals leads in some way to a distorted articulation of the need for the space of self-determination on a collective level [i.e. the Nazi idea of a *Lebensraum*], which has nothing to do with the original, individual need.[214]

Could those needs, constituted out of historical separations, have led to different historical results? Could the sense-of-self have led to the awareness that a different, more humane reality was possible? Could a process that ended up in false-consciousness also lead to awareness, to critical reflection? For Negt and Kluge, this possibility lies in the separation itself. For them, the separation of labour capacities from their object is actually "the prerequisite for an awareness of alienation to arise."[215] The same process that causes alienation (and which can lead to deadly outcomes) is also what allows for a free development of the subject.[216] In what follows, I discuss why, for Negt and Kluge, the rupture of a harmonic relation between the subject and its environment, between the working subject and its object, and thus of self-regulating processes, is a necessary step in the genesis of a free, autonomous subject.

I.4 Separations and the Awareness of Alienation

To understand how an unconscious, somatic reaction can lead to the awareness of alienation (and eventually to autonomous thinking) we need to go back, once again, to the second economy discussed above—that site where the motivation to exercise our creative powers (be it in physical or intellectual

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[214] Bowie, 'New Histories,' 202.

[215] Negt, in 'The History of Living Labor Power,' 51-52.

[216] This points to the fact that Negt and Kluge do not romanticize the pre-capitalist form of labour, as could be thought given their appeals to feudalism or to the 'peasant in me,' (HO, 82) or in their recurring reference to the idea of a 'golden age.' These 'myths' have a function qua fantasies which fuel an opposition to capitalism, and that is their value. (HO, 82) See also Fore, 'Introduction,' 52.

labour) is produced. This is also were the consciousness or awareness of *what* and *why* we are producing something is generated. For Negt and Kluge, the way subjects perform their activity will vary, depending on this degree of awareness. The labour of a pre-capitalist farmer, for example, where the relation between subject and object was more immediate, more 'organic,' was also a work that was taken for granted, not reflected upon. In this case, as Negt mentions, "labor characteristics are tied into an entirely natural work and life community; they do not exist separately from it and never have to seek out the object wherein they can be realized."[217] In this case, there is no strong distinction between individual and society, and thus something such as the possibility to question social norms and values—which drive the individual to work in certain ways and for certain purposes—is still not developed. The individual's interests are felt to be the social interests; the labour capacities are not reflected upon, since the object through which they realize themselves are always already at hand. But what happens when the relation between subject and object is ruptured? How is this break reflected within the subject? How can this generate a more autonomous subject?

At face value, it would seem that this break between subject and object would be simply alienating, since the objects that "allow people to realize and affirm their own labor characteristics are not readily at hand."[218] In this case, we speak of a rupture or lack of attunement between the subjective and objective parts necessary to perform labour.[219] Nevertheless, there is also a sense in which rupturing this relation—which has been congealed as 'second nature' and seems immediate—can have a positive outcome (and which, in a sense, is derived from the initial alienation). Among other things, the semblance of immediacy can make the subject blind to the fact that his or her reality is a historical

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[217] Negt, in 'The History of Living Labor Power,' 51.

[218] Negt, in 'The History of Living Labor Power,' 51.

[219] In this vein, Jaeggi defines alienation as "a relation of *relationlessness*. . .According to this formulation, alienation does not indicate the absence of a relation but is itself a relation, if a deficient one." Jaeggi, *Alienation*, 1.

construct, a product of people's (of its own) labour. As Bowie notes, this is an idea already present in Marx (and was later adopted by Heidegger), which states that it is only when "things cease to function as what they have become through the process of their production that we begin to understand the otherwise hidden nature of the world in which things are located."[220] In this vein, Negt and Kluge contend that when a 'natural' relation (such as the one between subject and object via unreflected labour) is broken, we can start attending to the process of production. (HO, 131-132) This process, Negt and Kluge argue, can "bring people to contemplate and recollect whether something in the production process itself went awry." (HO, 132)

For Negt and Kluge, it is from this break—which can put the focus on the process of production—that critical thought and autonomous thought can emerge. Without it, society cannot be exposed as a product of human labour, and henceforth as a historical creation. Negt and Kluge emphasize that, in this case, what appeared as a 'dead' object (a commodified society) could now be revealed to be congealed human relations and labour. "All things are enchanted human beings," Kluge likes to state, to emphasize this point.[221] Furthermore, in this shift, the lost possibilities of history could be seen as redeemable.[222] Negt and Kluge's point is that there are certain processes and constructions that only become visible when we can reflect upon the process of production, and that this is something that becomes opaque when our norms, habits, life cycles have become static, reified. (HO, 133)

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[220] Bowie, 'Kluge and Negt 30 Years On,' 79.

[221] I will discuss this phrase in relation to Kluge's aesthetic project below, especially in relation to his film *News From Ideological Antiquity*. See Chapter VI section III below.

[222] "Possible actions are initially as real as real ones," Negt and Kluge write. (HO, 133)

Separations can have an emancipatory outcome, because when the object of a worker is appropriated, i.e. when a subject-object relation is ruptured, the subject's capacities are released from their "lifelong ties to objects" and become "free to develop a deep, internal dimension."[223] Hence why, for Negt and Kluge, it is not in spite, but *by virtue of* the alienation caused by separations, that humans can become more autonomous: In the pre-separated state the immediacy of the subject-object relation would not allow the subject to ponder and question what motivates her to exercise her labour. Only *after* the separation would the possibility to reflect upon what moves us to work emerge. It is in this sense that, as Negt contends, separations "[generate] a potential for protest against being tied to determinate relations."[224] Hence why Negt and Kluge assert that capitalism has both an 'exploitative' and a 'generative' potency. (HO, 83)

Negt and Kluge's work allows us to see 'alienation'—that feeling of dissatisfaction, of discomfort when performing certain labour—under a new light, unearthing within it an emancipatory dimension. On the one hand, there *is* a loss when the subject is separated from the object of its labour: that of the material conditions that would allow it to realize its capacities. On the other, however, there is an important gain: the possibility for the subject to develop the capacity for reflection and autonomous thought, and therefore the (subjective) possibility to choose consciously *how* and *why* to apply its labour.[225] Negt and Kluge here perform a variation of a Hegelian argument, according to which, as Devin Fore has noted, the human becomes a subject through a two-step process: "first by

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[223] Negt, in 'The History of Living Labor Power,' 51.

[224] Negt, 51-52.

[225] Notably, this does not mean that the objective (as in social) conditions will necessarily allow it to exercise its will.

splitting and projecting itself and then by reappropriating those objectivated fragments of self from the world around it."[226]

The separation processes are necessary for human development, Negt and Kluge claim. This includes, notably, the development of the possibility for the subject to become a *self-conscious and autonomous subject.* Obstinacy's role is important, because it points to a lack of fit between the new attachments generated between subject and object. But it is also important since, without such a reaction, it would be difficult to explain how the subject is not simply 'absorbed' by the new social structures imposed after the previous appropriation or separation. In this sense, Negt and Kluge can be seen to perform a variation of Adorno's reflections on the necessity of a somatic or material impulse for autonomy and freedom—impulses that, however, need to be brought to consciousness for them to participate in the genesis of the autonomous subject.[227] Bowie's claim is on point: for Negt and Kluge, just as for Adorno, the "natural and historical forces that are inimical to self-determination ... at the same time [create] he possibility of some degree of liberation from these forces."[228]

Negt and Kluge argue that without the historical processes of separation, the awareness of (and succeeding construction of) what we actually need, of what interests us as both individuals and as part of a community, would be opaque, making it very hard to fight for those needs and interests. The rupture of 'originary' relations between subject and object can cause alienation, Negt and Kluge show, but it is also the source of a creative, generative potential—an '*Eigensinn,*' or sense-of-self—which makes it possible to protest against the imposition of heteronomous norms or values. It turns out that the process whereby labour becomes abstract can also be read as the "prerequisite" for the

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[226] Fore, 'Introduction,' 26.

[227] See e.g. Adorno, '*Intellectus sacrificium intellectus*,' in *Minima Moralia*, 122.

[228] Bowie, 'Kluge and Negt 30 Years On,' 80.

awareness of alienation.[229] Thus, contrary to what Adorno argued following Weber, the increase in 'rationalization' does not necessarily lead us into an 'iron cage.' In this sense, it is mistaken to think that as labour becomes abstract and instrumentalized, human beings *lose* their aims from sight, since these aims could not even be formulated *before* the process of separation. This is why, for Negt and Kluge, the process of history is not to be seen only as an incremental loss of freedom; it is also a process whereby the possibility to be free is generated.

The above (along with their understanding of alienation as a circuit of separations and (re)appropriations) should allow to see that Negt and Kluge *do not* conceive of the pre-capitalist past as a golden age. Rather, they understand the historical shift from a pre-capitalist society to a capitalist one as a movement where, indeed, there are subjective gains (many capacities, for example, are created) and where the immediacy of pre-capitalist relations between self-and world are overcome. However, capitalism remains problematic, since it is a social structure that makes alienation a structural condition. In capitalism, further, it becomes increasingly hard to see oneself reflected in the products of one's own labour and steer one's own lifeworld. Subjects may have gained individual capacities in the transition to a capitalist society but, as Negt contends, "they are not becoming richer in their composite ability to avail themselves of the products of their characteristics."[230] This is something to which I return in the following section.

Let me finally emphasize that Negt and Kluge's argument does not imply that there is a *necessary* path toward freedom (as in, e.g., the Hegelian reading of 'History' as the progressive consciousness of such freedom). Hence why they speak of a *potential*, and why they argue that labour capacities and self-

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[229] Negt, in 'The History of Living Labor Power,' 51-52.

[230] Negt, in 'The History of Living Labor Power,' 59. What is more, capitalism makes it barely possible "to achieve the necessary distance from [the condition of alienation] in view of that experience of loss." (Negt, 60)

regulation make the subject possess 'obstinacy,' not autonomy. Their use of this term is not accidental: '*Eigensinn*,' the German for 'obstinacy' implies both a sense of autonomy, of will, a pursuit for meaning, on the one hand; and a sense of stubbornness or arbitrariness, a disobedience that can cause blindness vis-à-vis objective reality, on the other hand. This is why, for example, Hegel speaks of obstinacy as a "freedom enmeshed in servitude."[231] Negt and Kluge, influenced by Hegel, are careful to define it as the "subjective precondition for successful separation."[232]

Obstinacy makes it possible for alienated subjects to react against conditions that objectively make them engage in alienating work and, consequently, do not allow them to realise their human potentials, i.e. to reach self-realization. But if obstinacy remains subjective, it does not suffice to bring about emancipation. I return to the problems with obstinacy in section III below. But before, in what follows, I argue—with Negt and Kluge—that even within a capitalist system, despite the 'totalizing' logic and the pervasiveness of commodification, the conditions to turn that 'subjective' reaction into a form of critical awareness are still present. Capitalism's dream of totality is revealed as unachievable.

II) <u>Resisting Capitalism? The Persistence of Primitive Accumulation</u>

Why has this potential for protest contained in obstinacy not been actualized? Why do people believe that capitalism is here to stay? Why is there a pervasive sense of apathy, hopelessness, conformism? All of these questions lurk behind the work of Negt and Kluge, and put into question whether—within the conditions of a capitalist society—the 'power' of obstinacy is actually helpful to understand

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[231] G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 119.

[232] "[T]his relation [of original property] is the notion of something of one's own (such as identity or subjectivity), one's language, an association with a community, or one's labor and life capacities. Ultimately, it is the subjective precondition for successful separation." (HO, 86)

the possibility of a social change. In what follows, I do not make the claim that the protest energy alone, *qua* obstinate reaction, is sufficient to justify the possibility of a radical and historical transformation. This requires a collective movement that steers that energy so that it produces self-conscious, autonomous subjects. What I argue instead is that, even within a capitalist system, the potential for protest contained in labour capacities cannot be eliminated, and following from the above, that neither can the possibility of autonomy. To do this, I reconstruct Negt and Kluge's characterization of capitalism's logic—which they characterize as a 'permanence' of primitive accumulation—as a social system based on the constant repetition of separations.

The concept of 'primitive accumulation,' first used by Marx in *Capital,* is central to understand Negt and Kluge's account of the persistence of resistance.[233] Just as central is to understand that, in their definition, this process is not presented as a one-off event but as a *constant* appropriation of properties and labour capacities which reproduces and sustains capitalism.[234] The importance of these two comes to the fore when we recall that they *also* contend that separations or acts of appropriation are responded with obstinacy. This is what allows Negt and Kluge to contend that capitalism cannot seamlessly posit itself and control subjects once and for all, but must necessarily leave 'gaps' where the potential to undermine it is reproduced. Negt and Kluge's account, therefore, shows that it is mistaken to conceive of capitalism as either a total system (i.e. as one where all social spheres are determined by its structural logic), or as a system that is inalterable. It is rather a historical and fragile social system. For Negt and Kluge, the permanence of primitive accumulation implies the permanent (re)production of protest energy: the possibility of transforming capitalism is embedded within its own logic.

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233 See Karl Marx, *Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): 521.

234 See footnote 170 above, and section II.1.

The notion of 'primitive accumulation' was used by Marx in order to expose how the separation of the labourer from his means of production was needed to account for the division between an owner class that accumulates and a class of dispossessed, 'free' labourers. In this vein, Marx writes that capitalism had to presuppose

> ... the separation of free labor from the objective conditions of its realization — from the means and material of labor. This means above all that *the workers must be separated from the land, which functions as his natural laboratory*.[235]

Negt and Kluge take this observation by Marx to be correct, but to be limited. According to them, the workers' 'natural laboratory,' i.e. the conditions that allowed for the realization of their capacities, cannot be limited to their land, the 'object' of their labour. Rather, 'primitive property' must be expanded to include peoples' sense of community, their environment, the family, among others. In short, 'property' is used to define what is felt to be one's own, 'proper' to one's life, and thus as that which gives sense to the workers' lifeworld, making the realization of their labour meaningful. Note, too, that 'capacities' can also be referred to as 'properties' [*Eigenschaften*]. This is central because, as we have seen, Negt and Kluge argue that the dispossession of their property (of their *Eigen-tum* and *Eigen-schaften*), is what brings about obstinacy, a sense-of-self [*Eigen-sinn*] in the subject. The persistence of this dis-possession, thus, is also the persistence of the (possibility) of resistance.

Negt and Kluge need to expand on Marx's characterization since, as they see it, the 'original' event of accumulation which separated the labourers from their landed property is not sufficient to account for how capitalism—with its inherent tendency toward ever-increasing growth and expansion,

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[235] Karl Marx, *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, trans. Jack Cohen, (New York: International Publishers, 1965), 67. My emphasis.

toward maximization and the generation of surplus—can sustain itself. Capitalism, in order to sustain its expansion, requires the constant appropriation of property, so once what Marx refers to as the 'means of production' is taken, it needs to look for other objects to appropriate. It therefore first expands geographically, only to then extend temporally, and ends up immersing itself within the subject—turning toward peoples' capacities, needs, values—in what Negt and Kluge call inwards imperialism (PSE, 170-171).[236] An example is the role of ideological manipulation through culture (something which I address in Chapter III) as a form of appropriation of people's thoughts. By 'colonizing' their consciousness, modern capitalism blocks workers from becoming aware of their alienated conditions, thus allowing for its (re)production.

Negt and Kluge's understanding of capitalism as a persistence of primitive property has consequences vis-à-vis the limits of capitalist colonization/accumulation. In short, the persistence of primitive accumulation implies that there must necessarily be *something* that the logic of capitalism is yet to appropriate and generate value from—spaces, processes, spheres to colonize and from which to derive value. The process of constant accumulation and valorization could not keep on going if there was nothing left to appropriate or valorize. Because capital needs to grow, it needs to integrate what currently lies beyond its boundaries, otherwise it would stagnate. And this goes as far as the integration of what Pavsek calls the "uncolonized realms of individual and collective experience."[237] It is important to note that this integration, besides sustaining capitalism's growth, is also performed

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[236] See, e.g., Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, (New York: Zone Books, (1994), for an account of the appropriation of people's 'attention' through the aesthetization of society. In somewhat similar terms to Negt and Kluge, David Harvey also speaks of a continuing 'primitive' accumulation and of a 'new imperialism.' Harvey speaks of 'accumulation by dispossession,' which refers to the accumulation of intellectual property, of natural and geographical zones, and of cultural objects. See David Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[237] Pavsek, *The Utopia of Film*, 212.

to avoid rebellion, to avoid people becoming aware that things could be different. Capitalism repeatedly accumulates in order to grow, but also to expropriate the cognitive capacities that would allow people to become aware of their alienation. The process of accumulation, for Negt and Kluge "a social principle on a wide scale,"[238] is thus *necessary* for capitalist reproduction. As Pavsek puts it, "capitalism can only survive if primitive accumulation is carried out *ad infinitum*."[239]

This process of constant accumulation/separation would need to be repeated 'infinitely' for capitalism to survive infinitely. And yet, in every iteration, in every act of appropriation, capitalism must also separate the subject from some of its properties or capacities. According to what we have discussed previously, however, this process would therefore also repeatedly produce the subjective preconditions for autonomous thought (including the capacity for resistance against alienation). Herein lies its weak spot, as Negt and Kluge suggest in an important passage from *Public Sphere and Experience*:

> [Capitalism] has the tendency to separate itself from all purely human qualities that hinder the more sophisticated organization of the process of valorization—it separates itself from use-values, human needs, the interests of the workers […]
>
> If capital were capable of consistently following this path toward what is as a whole a dead system, toward an ever-purer representation of the context of property and capital, the possibility would exist of eternalizing existing power relations. However, in order to advance along this path, it must increasingly absorb contexts of living, living labor, human raw material. Capitalism cannot avoid dirtying its hands with human beings. Herein lies its

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[238] Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Geschichte und Eigensinn*, (Frankfurt am Main: Zweitausendeins, 1981), 35. Cited in Pavsek, 'Negt and Kluge's Redemption of Labor,' 156.

[239] Pavsek, 'Negt and Kluge's Redemption of Labor,' 154. Emphasis in original.

extreme instability. (PSE, 185-186)

Capitalism lives off from the colonization of areas that used to be 'outside' its grasp, and henceforth from the imposition of its instrumental logic onto all types of systems (social relations, historical forms of labour, norms, values, modes of experience which have its own independent mode of functioning). When it imposes itself onto self-regulatory systems such as the human being or onto established subject-object relations—that is, onto spheres guided by non-instrumental laws, or where different values or forms of experience are constituted which follow their own imperatives—capitalism's its acts of separation disturb their functioning. But as we had seen, in disrupting these self-regulating processes, capitalism is also creating the opportunity for subjects to become aware of their needs and interests.[240] Differently put, it allows the subject to grow internally (making it more independent, more autonomous vis-à-vis external objects).

Primitive accumulation constantly (re)equips the labourer with the possibility to re-signify and recombine its skills and abilities, to recognize its desires, its wishes, to gain new ones. The clash between their needs and the impossibility to realize them, or to apply one's skills and capacities in a meaningful way, will lead people to generate energy that strives *against* heteronomy, and which is sensed as alienation. From the feeling of loss, of a lack, or the impossibility to realize one's own capacities, Negt and Kluge argue, the subject acquires obstinacy, a potential for protest, or as they also call it, an "unconscious practical critique of alienation." (PSE, 33)

For Negt and Kluge, the notion that capitalism has installed itself as a total system cannot but be false. As long as capitalism is fuelled on human capacities and relations, there will always be a

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[240] Note that in the process of gaining awareness of one's needs, the needs themselves are transformed. Thus, there is no implication that the awareness will lead to finding our 'authentic' or 'original' needs.

possible way out—the possible awareness of alienation, as well as the capacity to protest against alienation, cannot be eliminated. Capitalism—in constantly exploiting labour capacities for the mere sake of profit—also produces this potential for protest *ad infinitum*. Within capitalism, the possibility of resistance is persistent.

III) <u>Problems with Obstinacy and its Persistence: Orientation and Manipulation</u>

The initial question, nevertheless, remains: Why has the energy contained within subjects' capacities not been actualized? An important part of the answer lies on the fact that this energy does not depend on the subject's conscious decisions, but is located 'below' consciousness, as it were. Differently put, it lies on the fact that this energy is but a *potential* for resistance. The scars left by separations, as Negt and Kluge contend, are deeply embedded in people's subjectivity, something that makes them persistent, but also difficult to 'explain' or comprehend. The continual expropriation of capacities and needs, the repetition of violent separations, determines how people experience the world, how they articulate their needs, and leaves a mark on their subjective make-up. Yet, the path that leads to the expression and understanding of these experiences is not a straightforward one. In the way, protest energy can become a victim of distortions or manipulations.

Below, I explore two potential issues that emerge from Negt and Kluge's account of 'obstinate' reactions as presented so far. First, one could wonder whether an 'unconscious critique' of alienation—as they characterize the protest energy in *Public Sphere and Experience*—lacks political orientation. (PSE, 32) This is because a somatic and almost immediate sense of rejection is not necessarily oriented toward the 'correct' political goals, in part because without the level of conscious

processing, what 'correct' means cannot even be known.[241] A reaction such as obstinacy, or the critique of alienation contained in, e.g., fantasy, if these are to become effective political tools, would have to be oriented autonomously, collectively, and self-consciously. As long as this does not happen, however, a second danger emerges since, given their lack of intrinsic orientation, the protest energy contained in labour capacities can be manipulated and, in an ironic twist, serve against the interests of the subjects.[242] That this danger is present shows in that people are *still* sustaining alienating work—giving evidence that they are already manipulated against people's interests—and that this energy *has been used* to further alienating social conditions.

Negt and Kluge acknowledge and try to deal with these two issues. As I argue, for Negt and Kluge obstinacy is *not* a non-mediated guarantee for a redeemed historical experience, nor a direct source of social change. Obstinacy, instead, plays an ambivalent role in Negt and Kluge's work, since it transpires that for them, insofar as this energy remains unmediated, it can turn into an arbitrary and subjective will. Obstinacy remains true in-itself at the cost of abstractly negating what remains outside of the subject; this does not mean, however, that it stops being a trigger that can enable genuine emancipation.

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[241] This is similar to the experience of shock created by the avant-gardist work of art: intended as a stimulus to create a new perspective, its problem is its non-specificity. Lacking a "particular direction," Peter Bürger comments, it can lead to "blind fury" or "strengthen existing attitudes." Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 80.

[242] This was the worry that Adorno had, as we have seen above. Hence why he contended that those impulses were already collaborating toward the extinction of autonomous thought, instead of in its favour.

III.1 (Political) Orientation and Manipulation

Obstinacy operates by pushing against alienation, against unjust appropriation and oppression, but appears as an immediate, unconscious, somatic reaction: a sense of unrest, a hunger for meaning. On the one hand, what grants legitimacy to this somatic moment, as Adorno was painfully aware, is precisely its status as an expression of what has been repressed by the 'reality principle.'[243] Those reactions can thus be seen as cyphers of everything that does not fit into a world built upon the demand for efficiency, for rationality.[244] On the other hand, however, precisely because these reactions do not fit under the hegemonic principle, they appear (and can become) 'irrational,' something dangerous, whose underlying meaning becomes difficult to comprehend. For capitalism, this is an effective way of keeping social structures running: insofar as the energy that could change them is seen as 'unreal,' as irrational, as childish fantasies, its power will continue to be repressed and rendered harmless.

In this vein, Negt and Kluge argue that a central way in which capitalism reproduces domination is by hegemonically structuring the reality principle. As Bowie writes, for Negt and Kluge 'the easiest way of producing effective domination is by laying claim to insights into what is "really real."'[245] By making individuals convince themselves that there are no alternatives, and that the way social relations function is 'real,' their reactions against this social system appear as irrational, as non-real; their fantasies as flights of fancy. One central way the subjects are prevented from questioning

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[243] "'Woe speaks: 'Go.'",' Adorno famously writes. (ND, 203)

[244] As Adorno writes, and Kluge likes to remind us, "only what does not fit into this world is true." (AT, 76) See also Alexander Kluge, 'The Sharpest Ideology,' in *Alexander Kluge. Raw Materials*, 193.

[245] Bowie, '*Geschichte und Eigensinn*,' 186.

reality, then, is by making them believe that the existing social relations, not their labour, are what fuel reality, and that their 'feelings' of rejection have no value.

Blocking the development of protest energy into actual forms of protest is facilitated by obstinacy's subjective status. People's fantasies or obstinate reactions do not immediately tell anything of the relations between subjects and objects, of the social structures, or of the history and labour that is hidden behind reality's semblance of wholeness. Because of this, subjects either learn to ignore their fantasy, their feelings of alienation, or buy into political discourses, cultural objects, or propaganda that claim to address or mitigate their desires. This way, the moment of truth (i.e. the critique of heteronomy and alienation) within their reactions is lost—preventing these from triggering a deeper insight into the sources of their alienation, and into the nature of their 'reality.' People end up, e.g., buying into the ideology of the culture industry because of a need to find balance, to find meaning, both within themselves but also between them and their reality. As Bowie puts it, this responds to a "constant need to produce the idea that one's externalization of labor-power is part of an overall reality."[246] The culture industry answers to this need (albeit, as we will see in more detail below, without ever satisfying it genuinely). In this way, individuals are prevented from trying to comprehend *why* these feelings prevail, and what they can tell us—they are prevented from understanding the relation between 'psychological' or 'subjective' reactions and structural conditions.

The production of capitalist reality is so effective because, lacking orientation (having lost what used to provide meaning and our inner balance), *obstinacy becomes an easy target for external manipulation:* individuals convince themselves that actual social relations, that the hegemonic public sphere, is all that is real. Why, we could ask, does a worker in a factory remain engaged in menial, repetitive tasks,

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[246] Bowie, '*Geschichte*,' 186.

without any apparent opposition (even if this labour produces no fulfilment, or no satisfaction)? The power of the 'reality principle' is so strong that, paired with her desire for meaning, she turns her energies, a subjective (and yet undefined) need for something different, into strategies to "participate in this mechanized process," as Negt and Kluge argue.[247] She does this by engaging in what Negt and Kluge call 'balance labour,' and which Kluge describes as that labour necessary "to be able to face life in industry, at work, and in these relationships and not run away."[248] This labour redirects obstinacy's protest energy, turning it into a (temporal, artificial) way of finding equilibrium. She therefore begins to daydream, to fantasize, takes longer breaks than she is allowed or secretly listens to music while working.[249] Or she turns on the television, goes to the 'movies,' and gets distracted—for a moment, she forgets her feelings of alienation.

What is happening is that the culture industry is tapping into her surplus energy—preventing it to turn into critique, and reproducing her as a consumer/labourer.[250] Lacking time for organization, our fantasies, our obstinacy can be appropriated (once again) by "commodity interests, which exploit this state of affairs, [and] work to cement the existing forms of rule." (PSE, 176) As we will see in detail in the next chapter, then, the "attempts by the masses to assert their fantasy can be redirected into conservative channels," used to stabilize and reproduce, rather than topple, the existing social order. (PSE, 176)

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[247] Negt, in 'The History of Living Labor Power,' 45.

[248] Kluge, 'The Political as Intensity of Everyday Feelings,' 288.

[249] Negt and Kluge mention the work of Marianne Herzog, who describes the behaviour of some welders: she "sweeps her arms backward in a winglike fashion after welding approximately thirty spots in order to proceed with her functional labor that entails welding yet another thirty pieces of pipe or so. The sweeping movement is real for her person (that is, her lived time). The rest of her movements are unreal." (HO, 134)

[250] See, e.g. Alexander Kluge, 'On Film and the Public Sphere,' in *Alexander Kluge. Raw Materials*, 37-38.

This is why even when humans, *qua* material beings, have an instinctive, constitutive capacity (namely, what Negt and Kluge call self-regulation) that allows them distinguishing what, as Kluge puts it, "attracts me and what repels me," pain from pleasure, the opposite, nevertheless, always seems to occur.[251] Insofar as experiences are filtered by the hegemonic principle—forced through the 'needle's eye' of exchange value[252]—it becomes very hard to decode or self-assess what one needs to find self-realization, to freely develop one's capacities. Alienation, understood here as a deficient relation between a subjective capacity and its object, is experienced as rejection or unrest, but the experience (sensual, immediate) is detached from the awareness of the structural connection between this reaction, its causes, or the way to fix this relation. This becomes a political problem in itself, since, as Negt comments:

> The fewer opportunities there are for people to participate in the body politic, the more expenditure there will be in the balance economy. We then talk of resignation, apathy, or consumerism."[253]

What could, when properly directed, become the source of social protest or resistance, becomes energy invested in enduring alienated labour. (HO, 135) Similarly, it can become energy invested in consuming the products of the culture industry, turning what could motivate us to act toward change into a form of passive consumption. Hence why, as Negt and Kluge contend, in a key passage to

[251] Hopf, 'Feelings can Move Mountains,' 243. This is a recurring theme in Kluge's story on 'The Air Raid on Halberstadt, 8 April 1945,' which I discuss briefly in Chapter VI.

[252] Negt and Kluge, *Geschichte und Eigensinn*, 159.

[253] Negt, in 'The History of Living Labor Power,' 45.

understand their critical project, "the political left must first of all reorganize fantasies in order to make them capable of self-organization." (PSE, 176)[254]

It can also happen that the pressure of the reality principle becomes so strong that performing 'balance labour' stops being sufficient. In this case, obstinacy erupts violently, and can even become destructive. "[A]ll the feelings combined pursue a destructive course of action, as if struck by blindness: a one-sided course that incessantly propels us forwards," Kluge writes. "This sequence is quite typical. Something starts beautifully and ends horrifically."[255] As individuals start to accumulate pressure from the external world, their dreams and fantasies end up abstractly negating the reality principle—in this way, obstinacy becomes arbitrary. "Under historical-cultural relations, the defence of dialectical perception is thus more likely to stave off than to turn towards the reality principle," Negt and Kluge write. (HO, 258.)[256] When 'obstinate' reactions blindly start to guide the individual's actions without passing through consciousness, they act like myths and abstractly determine their own 'reality' rather than "[consigning] themselves to the hellish circumstances of a winding movement." (HO, 258) As Negt and Kluge put it, when humans end up breaking under pressure, they *themselves* produce consciousness in distorted ways (HO, 250).

As long as obstinacy unfolds over an alienating society, it easily becomes either the fuel for a balancing act that, although it allows the worker to survive the strains of capitalism, it also helps capitalism to run smoothly; or an abstract reaction that leads to violence or escapism—also allowing

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[254] It is here where certain forms of art will have the possibility to intervene—as I detail in upcoming chapters.

[255] Hopf, 'Feelings can Move Mountains,' 243: "[W]e can only gain more experience if the feelings deploy their mass capacity for distinguishing things in such a direction. But instead they are used as the driving force for keeping what exists in place."

[256] Negt and Kluge tend to emphasize sections of their work using bold typeset, as is the case of this passage. This is something I will remove since, out of context, this can be more confusing than insightful.

the reality principle to reinforce its rule. Obstinacy *does not necessarily* turn into resistance or protest, and might even be self-undermining for its subject (hence why its persistence must become the focus of political labour.) A passage by Adorno found in *Negative Dialectics* on the nonidentical is illuminating in this regard:

> In the person, this distinguishing element necessarily appears as nonidentity. Whatever stirs in a man contradicts his unity. Every impulse in the direction of better things is not only rational, as it is to Kant; before it is rational, it is also stupid. Men are human only where they do not act, let alone posit themselves, as persons. (ND, 277)

Obstinacy, wilful activity, is the name Negt and Kluge give to that impulse in the direction of better things. Yet, it remains at that first stage of arbitrariness, of 'stupidity,' as Adorno puts it here.

Despite its truth content, then, obstinacy remains—when left to itself—trapped. As the subjective side of the will, as Hegel writes, obstinacy is one-sided. Detached from reality, a 'wilful reaction' (as an "unfulfilled end") can become blind and arbitrary, "still only a content belonging to the self-consciousness, an unaccomplished end."[257] While obstinacy possesses the energy that could lead to social upheaval, and to the transformation of oppressive social structures, when it acts in isolation—disregarding its context, the social structures that surround it—it remains formless and arbitrary.[258] In this case, it turns into an abstract hope, into blind optimism, or into reactive praxis—and as history has taught us, these usually lead to catastrophe. "[H]ow can one avoid being made

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[257] G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H.B. Nisbet, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): §25, 55. The image Negt and Kluge use to illustrate the ambivalence of obstinacy is found in the shortest of the stories in the brothers Grimm's *Tales*, 'The Obstinate Child,' and which lends the name to their own *History and Obstinacy*. Given its brevity and the power of its images, I present it as Appendix at the end of the thesis.

[258] Negt and Kluge describe it, as has been mentioned, as a drive or impulse remaining "*faithful to itself* and pursuing *its own* autonomous line of force." Jameson, 'On Negt and Kluge,' 158.

stupid either through the power of the powerful or through one's own powerlessness?" Kluge asks. It is the desire to avoid subjects being made stupid, rendered powerless, that guides Negt and Kluge's work, and that guides the rest of this thesis.[259]

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Negt and Kluge work is intended to show that there are always already opportunities present for opposing alienation and to develop as autonomous subjects. According to their account, even if capitalism can socialize the subject, imposing its ways of experiencing, its reified thought patterns, it can never oppose *absolutely* the way the human being functions. By accounting for the persistence of obstinacy (as a potential for protest against alienation) Negt and Kluge's work aims to expose that the subject cannot be seamlessly constructed or apprehended, i.e. that it cannot be completely objectified. And while this is something that for moments Adorno pointed towards, given his construal of the entwinement of reason and reification, and of the subjective drive toward self-preservation, he could not adequately justify it.[260] Negt and Kluge turn toward the internal constitution of the subject in order to trace the limits of power, as well as the irreducibility of the material needs and experiences of the labourers. And while these, as we have seen, can be turned against the subject's own interests, it is also true that the radical motivation that drives our obstinate reactions can also, in Kluge's words, "alone [enable] one to look realistically and attentively."[261]

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[259] Kluge, quoted in Pavsek, *The Utopia of Film*, 150.

[260] See, e.g. Theodor Adorno, 'Transparencies on Film,' *New German Critique*, No. 24/25, (Autumn 1981 – Winter 1982): 199-205, or 'Free Time,' in *Critical Models*, 174. See Chapter III, section I.1 below for more on this subject.

[261] Kluge, 'The Political as Intensity of Everyday Feelings,' 121. Note that for Kluge, the 'realist' attitude is never conformity to the status quo. "The motive for realism is never the confirmation of reality but protest," Kluge also writes in 'The Sharpest Ideology,' 192.

How can we turn this balance labour into actual resistance? How can people become conscious that their feelings of rejection, the sense of meaninglessness, is rooted in structural contradictions? How can we push obstinacy and make it lead us from conformism and into the awareness of our alienation? How can the persistence of a subjective form of resistance lead to the rational and collective organization of *autonomous* individuals? In the following chapters, I draw on Negt and Kluge's account of the public sphere and on the relation between the emancipatory power of the aesthetic, the culture industry, and popular culture, in order to show how this might be possible. Aesthetic objects and cultural objects, Negt and Kluge argue, can provide orientation to our 'unconscious criticisms' of alienation, and thus make our obstinate reactions the triggers for self-reflection and critical thought. Contrary to what Adorno contended, therefore, they expose that it is not only 'autonomous art' that can provoke critique and social awareness. The objects of the so-called culture industry can do this just as well (if not better). In doing so, they also show the limits of Adorno's understanding of the culture industry.

Chapter III: The Culture Industry and the (Cultural) Appropriation of Capacities

According to Negt and Kluge, I argued in the previous chapter, there is always a residue, a creative and generative power that capitalism must produce in its attempt to colonize every area of society and of the subject. This is what Negt and Kluge call 'obstinacy.' However, I concluded with a note of caution: while obstinacy can turn into protest or autonomy, it can also be rendered powerless. When obstinacy finds no ways out, it can be used as a compensation that allows individuals to "face life in industry, at work, and in [their] relationships," as Kluge writes.[262] From outside, in this case, obstinacy appears as passivity or conformism, as a form of "fantasy under domination."[263] Therefore, even when obstinacy would still be a symptom of the possibility to resist the logic of capitalism, whether it will lead to powerlessness and stupidity,[264] or instead enable subjects to, as Kluge puts it, "look realistically and attentively" at reality and think autonomously, [265] becomes a political question. This question, however, cannot be decided merely by looking at the self-regulating economy of the subject.

At stake in Negt and Kluge's work on 'obstinate' reactions is the possibility of autonomous thought, which in their work is expressed through the concept of a fully lived experience, or *Erfahrung*.[266] And to achieve this fully lived experience, according to Negt and Kluge, it is necessary to

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[262] Kluge, 'The Political as Intensity of Everyday Feelings,' 288. See also Kluge, 'On Film and the Public Sphere,' 36 and 42. Negt and Kluge thus speak of a 'balance economy' and sometimes refer to the human being as a '*homo compensator*.' (HO, 125)

[263] Kluge, 'On Film and the Public Sphere,' 43. The translation of the word '*phantasie*' into 'phantasy' has here been changed into 'fantasy,' in order for this to be consistent with the use of the word in *Public Sphere and Experience*.

[264] The notion of 'stupidity' is a reference to Adorno and Horkheimer, who in the concluding fragment of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 'In the Genesis of Stupidity' write: "Stupidity is a scar." (DE, 214)

[265] Kluge, 'The Political as Intensity of Everyday Feelings,' 121.

[266] As Miriam Hansen has noted, the concept of *Erfahrung* has a different weight than the English 'experience,' since

integrate this spontaneous, somatic reaction, with the analytical and conceptual capacities of reason. Obstinacy, as a form of what Christopher Pavsek calls "material perception," would be blind without concepts; just as pure conceptuality, without the somatic moment, would remain empty, to recall Kant's dictum—which is recurrently referred to by Negt and Kluge.[267] But this is precisely what capitalism does: namely, separating between abstract and concrete labour, i.e. between the analytical, conceptual capacities—'understanding'—and the practical, sensual skills—the 'sensibility' contained in obstinacy. The political problem for critical theory, therefore, is finding ways to fight against this logic.

In order to do this, Negt and Kluge believe that critical theory must focus on two tasks: first, finding ways in which intellectual labour can cooperate with the oppressed and alienated subjects, so that the protest energy contained in obstinacy can find adequate (non-alienating) 'ways out,' routes of escape from the heteronomous logic of capitalism. According to them, it is through cooperation—and not by imposing theoretical models—that theory can aid alienated subjects to develop their *own* forms of thinking and experience autonomously.[268] The second task, on which I focus in this chapter, is contributing to the comprehension of the ideological mechanisms of capitalism—and as Adorno already knew, the 'culture industry' is one of its most effective ones. Understanding it, therefore, is central for Negt and Kluge, since this industry, with its monopoly of the mass media, is currently turning much of people's obstinacy and fantasy (which could otherwise lead to protest and critique)

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it captures a distinction central to both Adorno's and Benjamin's thought. This is the distinction between the stable subject-object relation of the 'expert' which controls its object when 'experiencing' reality conveyed by *Erlebnis*, and the "sense of mobility, of journeying, wandering, or cruising, implying both a temporal dimension . . . and a degree of risk to the experiencing subject" which *Erfahrung* conveys. See Hansen, 'Foreword,' xvi.

267 Pavsek, *The Utopia of Film*, 159.

268 For Negt and Kluge, the goal is that "workers can have experiences of their own behavior and consciousness." (PSE, 27)

into passivity, conformism, into a sense of powerlessness. This industry stands as a stumbling block between critique and the possibility of a radical social change.

Throughout their first cooperative work, *Public Sphere and Experience*, published in 1972, Negt and Kluge had already pointed toward the dangerous effects that the 'consciousness industry' could have on people's obstinacy and on their energy for protest.[269] They were referring to the 'culture industry,' that concept popularized by Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and which became one of the most debated and influential concepts within the tradition of the Frankfurt School. Yet, the change of name does not mean that Negt and Kluge were immune to the influence of Adorno and Horkheimer's analysis. In their work, the rise of television, film, and other mass media—which together form what Adorno called a "total system"[270]—is still present as one of the most dangerous threats to the development of autonomous subjects. This system, according to Negt and Kluge, was absorbing people's cognitive capacities, their protest energy, therefore blocking any alternative 'way out' for people's obstinacy.

In short, for Negt and Kluge (just as for Adorno) the new media function by blocking the movement of obstinacy toward consciousness, steering it toward the commodities it sells and the promises these make. The subjects' unconscious reactions, their attempts toward escape, once enmeshed within this system, Negt and Kluge contend, take place inside the (metaphorical) "prison walls" of the mass media:

> What one is allowed to feel, express, communicate as a realistic person is molded by the

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[269] Hans Magnus Enzensberger coined the phrase when referring to capitalism's "consciousness-shaping industry." See Enzensberger, 'Constituents of a Theory of the Media,' 47.

[270] See DE, 94: "Culture today is infecting everything with sameness. Film, radio, and magazines form a system. Each branch of culture is unanimous within itself and all are unanimous together."

> mode of interaction in the factory, in everyday life, and above all, transmitted by the mass media. (PSE, 30-31)

This being the case, one could question the viability and usefulness of Negt and Kluge's analyses of the 'persistence of resistance.' What good is it that obstinate reactions cannot be eliminated, one could wonder, if these can ultimately be reabsorbed by capitalism, turning them into a source of passivity and into even more profit? And was not this point already made by Adorno, something that led him to his pessimistic conclusions about the viability of social change?

At face value, it would seem that Negt and Kluge's analysis is just as pessimistic as Adorno's: even if the capitalist logic of separations is constantly producing the conditions for autonomous thought, capitalism has found a way to integrate *even this residue of experience*. Commodified culture, once the locus of protest, becomes a source of human debasement, and instead of expanding people's critical capacities ends up blocking their development. (CIR, 13) Does Negt and Kluge's work on the consciousness industry and the mass media only confirm Adorno's claims? Are we to expect that, with the aid of the culture industry, capitalism finally manages to turn subjects into objects, putting the last nail in the coffin of a subject which, at least for Adorno, was already virtually extinct? As we will see throughout this chapter, Negt and Kluge's analysis of the consciousness industry is not so bleak as it might appear at first instance. To show this, throughout this chapter I argue that, while for Negt and Kluge the culture industry *does* play a role in how people's obstinate reactions are taken up in capitalism, their approach *also* shows that the net effect is not as bleakly integrative as Adorno (or even Habermas) might suggest.

Let me anticipate Negt and Kluge's argument, which I develop in this chapter. On the one hand, as Kluge states in his essay 'The Sharpest Ideology,' capitalism's need to have such strong

ideological mechanisms as the culture industry exposes the persistence of protest.[271] This is in line with his and Negt's account of capitalism as a system based on the need for a repeated, quasi-compulsive accumulation, which lives off what (necessarily) stands outside of it. In the case of the consciousness industry, Negt and Kluge argue that while it can manipulate this residual protest, it cannot eliminate it—as could otherwise be thought. Perhaps more importantly (and originally), on the other hand, Negt and Kluge's work also shows that the consciousness industry has a 'positive' function, which emerges from its necessary involvement with people's wishes, hopes, fantasies and expectations—instances of people's recurring protest energy. (PSE, 186)

In Negt and Kluge's work the consciousness industry appears not a mechanism that *produces* false fantasies or needs. Rather, it feeds on the fantasies produced by humans, and provides them with forms with which they become articulated in public. That is, it interprets their needs for them, in ways that benefit the reproduction of capitalism.[272] Importantly, however, in trying to 'seduce' individuals toward its products, it provides them forms through which those 'blind' contents within the subject are articulated, giving those needs and fantasies public visibility.[273] And while those forms might not be optimal nor allow individuals to reach full autonomy, the culture industry still excavates obstinacy from the unconscious reaches of the subject, providing with substance what used to remain unconscious or simply 'felt.' In so doing, it allows subjects to grasp (in however distorted forms) the otherwise unmediated contents of their experience, and thus to re-articulate their experiences, to 'make sense' of their intuitions. For Negt and Kluge, here lies one of capitalism's blind-spots.

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[271] See Kluge, 'The Sharpest Ideology,' 192.

[272] Kluge, 'On Film and the Public Sphere,' 36. "The media are standing on their head," Kluge contends there.

[273] Kluge, 'The Sharpest Ideology,' 193.

In this chapter, I begin by reconstructing Negt and Kluge's critique of the culture industry (section I). I do this by briefly touching upon some of the characteristics of Adorno's account of the 'culture industry' which will be contrasted with Negt and Kluge's. As we will see, while they deviate from the bleak conclusions reached by Adorno, Negt and Kluge do not simply buy into the narrative that presents mass culture as the 'culture of the people.' Actually, they are as critical of this industry as Adorno, and are aware that the culture industry's social function *is* economic and ideological. What they call 'public spheres of production,' and its main component, the 'consciousness industry,' are thus characterized by Negt and Kluge as mechanisms based on cognitive exploitation—or in terms of their critique of capitalism, a 'primitive accumulation' of cognitive capacities. According to them, this industry appropriates people's capacities (in particular their fantasies, desires, needs) in order to extract value from them, but also (in absorbing these cognitive capacities) helps the cultural and economic order of capitalism appear as legitimate.

In the following section, I argue that the role of the consciousness industry is self-undermining, and, what is more, has an emancipatory potential (section II). This is due to two of its characteristics: First, in contrast to the 'traditional' or 'classic' media like radio and film, and given the technological advances, the consciousness industry can now reach increasingly more constituencies. But what is more, it can also address the needs and interests of a plurality of constituencies and social groups in their particularity (section II.1). Second, Negt and Kluge argue that this industry does not produce people's fantasies, but merely reflects them back to them (section II.2). But, given the particular way in which fantasy functions, this also constrains what this industry can do with it—most notably, how much sameness it can impose. The combination of the articulation of fantasies, and the preservation of their qualitative diversity, as we will see, allows Negt and Kluge to argue that the ideological function of the consciousness industry in bound to fail. This, because in making people's needs and fantasies publicly visible, it provides individuals with the symbolic tools with which to

articulate their social suffering and indignation. Consequently, the attempt to reproduce subjects as passive consumers also allows individuals to realize that the capitalist system of appropriation cannot fulfil its ideological promises.

The relevance of this becomes most prominent when comparing the values and ideals whose construction the new media facilitates, with the values and ideals of the capitalist 'productive' or 'economic' sector. As we will see in the final part of the chapter (section III), then, Negt and Kluge's analysis exhibits a tension between the capitalist economy and its ideological mechanisms, since the latter encourages the constitution of a self-understanding that is at odds with the capitalist economy's 'work ethic.' In short, I argue that the consciousness industry allows individuals to articulate values and ideals that emerge from their repressed and undervalued capacities, and which conflict with those other heteronomously imposed values necessary to sustain the work discipline demanded by capitalism.

Finally, I explore a potential worry that emerges from the apparent absorption by capitalism's 'new spirit' of that critical moment which emerges from people's demands for the self-realization of their own needs, values, and fantasies. I tentatively contend that the pervasiveness of alienation is a sign that capitalism has not changed so substantially as it might appear and that, for as long as it imposes itself heteronomously upon the subject, it will (re)produce the energy to protest against it.

I) From the Culture Industry to the Consciousness Industry

According to Negt and Kluge, the formal and instrumental rationality of capitalism becomes tendentially more pervasive, absorbing ever-more realms of society, until its logic of separations

becomes the "social principle on a wide scale."[274] This logic, according to Negt and Kluge, follows a path toward abstraction, which they characterize as a

> tendency to separate itself from all purely human qualities that hinder the more sophisticated organization of the process of valorization—it separates itself from use-values, human needs, the interests of the workers. (PSE, 185-186)

Capitalism, as we had seen, separates the (material and symbolic) producers of society not only from the 'means of production' as understood by Marx, but (tendentially) from *all* their 'properties' and capacities, i.e. from the basic conditions of human existence.

In its tendency toward expansion and unlimited accumulation, capitalism appropriates what it needs to produce more wealth without regard for people's history or their context of living.[275] Capacities are objectified, reduced to abstract tools that are made to function without any concern for human needs and interests. (PSE, 163) Contrary to the self-regulating nature of human beings, Negt and Kluge contend, the "movement of capitalism is mechanical and unintentional." (PSE, 163) But importantly, as we saw in the previous chapter, because this movement is so at odds with the sedimented needs and processes of the human subjects *qua* living labour, this mechanic, compulsive logic is unable to completely colonize the internal organization of the subject. Negt and Kluge thus undo capitalism's presumption of 'totality.'[276] *Pace* Adorno, capitalism cannot establish itself as a seamless whole. The attempts to 'instrumentalize' the human interfere with its self-regulation and

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[274] Negt and Kluge, *Geschichte und Eigensinn*, 35.

[275] "Under capitalism all production is for the market; goods are produced not in order to meet human needs and desires, but for the sake of profit." (See Bernstein, 'Introduction,' 5).

[276] For Negt and Kluge, as Pavsek writes, it is false "that once capital has established itself as the prevailing mode of production it has created the necessary conditions for its continued existence." Pavsek, 'Negt and Kluge's Redemption of Labor,' 154.

necessarily produce obstinacy. However, *with* Adorno, Negt and Kluge are aware that capitalism has developed a very effective tool to tackle the potential protest contained within obstinacy: the culture industry.

I.1 Adorno's Culture Industry: The Reproduction of Reification

Although Adorno never spoke of 'obstinacy,' he did speak of somatic impulses, of a 'mimesis' whose preservation, as we have seen, was central for the possibility of autonomy.[277] In this vein, a way to construe the difference between autonomous art and the objects of the culture industry—and thus to understand the role he assigned to the latter—can start from differentiating the way these two engage with those mimetic, obstinate impulses which escape by the wayside of capitalist commodification. Both autonomous art and the culture industry, Adorno asserts, detach themselves from the 'harshness' and 'seriousness' of everyday life. However, the former, as we have seen, becomes autonomous by resisting subsumption by the imperatives of efficiency and practicality, i.e. of the reproduction of life. Art's social function, Adorno asserts, is its functionlessness—and it is this which makes true art safeguard "freedom in the midst of unfreedom."[278] An important part of this safeguarding involves the preservation of mimesis, as discussed in Chapter I.

The objects of the culture industry, for their part, have lost the critical impulse of art and, what is more, they aid capitalism in furthering its logic. Instead of "recollectively [assimilating] whatever has been left along the way in the process of the progressive control of nature," acting as "the perennial

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[277] See Chapter I, II.2: 'Formal Liberation,' above.

[278] Theodor Adorno, 'Is Art Lightheaded?,' in *Notes to Literature*, Vol. 2, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 21. See also AT, 297.

claim of the particular over the general" as authentic cultural objects do, Adorno contends,[279] the culture industry furthers the integration of those impulses and instances into the false totality of capitalism. It achieves this by providing a substitute gratification, or what for Negt and Kluge would appear as a false escape valve, a temporary way of finding 'balance.'[280] Oriented toward consumption, the objects of the culture industry accommodate themselves to the demands of capitalism. In doing so, they reproduce the subject as an uncritical, reified consumer, as labour power.

According to Adorno's work, the culture industry fulfils both an economic and a political-ideological function. The former's presence is clearly sensed in Adorno's characterization of the industry's production of objects for consumption, which are "manufactured more or less according to plan." (CIR, 12) The logic of capitalism permeates the sphere of culture in the form of standardized products and of the rationalization of the techniques of distribution. But in Adorno's analysis another important aspect comes to the fore, since according to him, those cultural products "to a great extent determine the nature of that consumption." (CIR, 12) Needs, according to this view, are imputed from above—hence why for Adorno these are (false) needs, i.e. needs *produced* by the industry to reproduce the audience as consumers, something that points to its ideological function. As Adorno writes, "[the] culture industry misuses its concern for the masses in order to duplicate, reinforce and strengthen their mentality, which it presumes is given and unchangeable." (CIR, 12)

It turns out that it is not only a matter of accumulating profit, but also of allowing a system based merely on profit accumulation to sustain itself. And to do this, it attempts (and according to him virtually succeeds) to reproduce the reified consciousness of the masses. The economic function of the industry, it transpires, runs parallel to an ideological one. The 'political' function of culture—

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279 Adorno, 'Culture and Administration,' 97.

280 See, e.g., Kluge, 'The Political as Intensity of Everyday Feelings,' 125.

namely, the "protest against the petrified relations under which [human beings] lived" (CIR, 13)—is shown to be replaced by one whose aim is preserving the *status quo*.

Adorno's account portrays the story of a decline in the function of the 'aesthetic' vis-à-vis society. According to him, as society became slowly commodified, the critical role of culture tendentially vanished—pushed into the realms of high art. The culture that remained in touch with society could hardly be defined as 'culture' anymore. (This is not to say that Adorno was not aware that 'high' art was also problematic. Actually, he constantly emphasized that it preserved a 'bad conscience,' product of its separation from society.[281]) According to him, for a brief moment, there was a type of synthesis in which light or folk art still preserved its dignity, insofar as it remained the expression (however narrow or distorted) of a specific community or culture. Yet, after Mozart's *Magic Flute*, for Adorno a paradigmatic event in the history of art, 'light' music lost all its seriousness and critical impulse. Once commodified, light music becam a tool for ideological manipulation, made not *by,* but *for* the masses by the culture industry.

The culture industry becomes the target of Adorno's criticism since it has nothing left of the critical impulse of high art nor of the dignity of folk art. Turned into a mass industry that produces commodities through and through, it merely furthers the atomization and homogenization of individuals.[282] As such, Adorno actually conceived of it as doubly problematic, since it furthered the dissolution of the autonomous subject, but *also* that of "the popular." The culture industry, he

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281 See DE, 107-108. Also, e.g., Bernstein, 'Introduction,' 7-8.

282 There are, indeed, moments where Adorno seems to allow for some ambiguity within this industry—as in his famous letters to Walter Benjamin. But it seems clear to me that this does not change substantially the core of his critique. See Theodor Adorno, 'Correspondence with Benjamin,' *New Left Review*, I, 81, (September – October 1973): 66: "Both [high and low culture] bear the stigmata of capitalism, both contain elements of change." I return to this below.

contends, merely constructs a false universality that has "nothing whatsoever to do, and nothing in common, with older forms of popular or folk art," as Fredric Jameson remarks.[283] Or as Adorno himself notes, '[t]here is no longer any "folk" whose songs and games could be taken up and sublimated by art; the opening up of markets and the bourgeois process of rationalization have subordinated all society to bourgeois categories."[284]

There are instances where Adorno himself seems to doubt that the consciousness of the cultural consumers has been so thoroughly integrated:

> Apparently the integration of consciousness and free time has not yet wholly succeeded ... The real interests of individuals are still strong enough to resist, up to a point, their total appropriation.[285]

It is from this moment of ambivalence, specifically from this potential for resistance, as Andreas Huyssen remarks, that an analysis of mass culture must once again be resumed.[286] If Adorno is correct, that is, this implies that the subjects have not (yet) been completely degraded. It also opens up the possibility to consider whether everything 'popular' or 'public' has been dissolved. This would imply that the needs and interests of both individual subjects *and* of different audiences must be taken seriously. This does not mean taking them at face value, however, but, as Huyssen puts it, it *does* imply that one "must avoid the automatic denunciation of desires for fun and entertainment" as illegitimate.[287] Negt and Kluge—aware of the persistence of a moment of resistance toward being

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[283] Fredric Jameson, 'Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture,' *Social Text*, No. 1, (Winter, 1979): 134.

[284] Theodor Adorno, 'On the Social Situation of Music,' *Telos* 35, (March 1978): 160.

[285] Adorno, 'Free Time,' 175. Below, I briefly discuss Adorno's essay 'Transparencies on Film' in these terms. See footnote 404 below.

[286] See Andreas Huyssen, 'Introduction to Adorno,' *New German Critique*, No. 6 (Autumn, 1975): 10.

[287] Huyssen, 'Introduction to Adorno,' 10.

instrumentalized—avoid this pitfall, without, however, easily falling for the claim that equates this industry with the culture of 'the people.' Their analysis of mass culture and of the 'consciousness industry' provides a fruitful way to unearth within it an emancipatory moment.

I.2 Negt and Kluge and the Consciousness Industry

Negt and Kluge's theory of the consciousness industry can be seen as a continuation of their analyses of capitalism, which they characterize as a system that inevitably produces an 'excess' energy when imposing itself heteronomously on the self-regulating subject. In line with this, the rise of the consciousness industry is conceived as a response to the persistence of this protest energy which, they argue, finds refugee in people's wishes and fantasies when it is repressed and therefore detached from reality. Capitalism, through the consciousness industry, makes people's fantasies and wishes a new source of profit by manipulating these, attaching them to the latest products. The consciousness industry, Negt and Kluge write, thus turns "human consciousness and contexts of living into its most important raw material." (PSE, 186) With this, the possible ways out for obstinacy are occluded, and the possibility for individuals to self-organize their experiences hindered.

However, contrary to Adorno's theory of the culture industry, Negt and Kluge are aware that the fantasies, wishes, and needs of the oppressed are so varied and multifaceted that these cannot be so easily standardized and homogenized as Adorno contended. These experiences "are produced as qualitative moments," Negt and Kluge claim, and thus cannot be reduced to a common denominator. (PSE, 44) According to them, the diversity of needs, wishes and interests, the multi-layered quality of fantasy, cannot be simply subsumed under the false universality of the culture industry. It is here where Negt and Kluge's analysis of what they call the 'public spheres of production' and the 'consciousness industry' differs from Adorno's analysis of the culture industry. Aware of the pluralization of social

groups which characterizes late capitalist societies—and hence of their fantasies, needs and interests—Negt and Kluge become suspicious of the thesis whereby the culture industry is seen to apprehend people's consciousness through homogeneous and standardized products, and by deploying a 'one-size-fits-all' message. This observation allows Negt and Kluge to theorize a new emerging form of social organization of consciousness. This is why they no longer speak of the culture industry, but instead refer to the 'consciousness industry.'

Before discussing their understanding of this industry, I briefly clarify what Negt and Kluge mean when speaking of 'fantasy,' a capacity that contains a potential to trigger collective forms of resistance. In fantasy, as we will see, lies one of the last hopes to unearth the "fictitious nature of the reality principle."[288] This allows me to, afterwards, explain the role that the 'consciousness industry' plays in Negt and Kluge's theory—a role for which fantasy is key.

I.3 The Persistence of Fantasy

Throughout their work, Negt and Kluge speak of material forces that emanate from the self-regulatory forces of the human being (from its consciousness, its body) and that react against the capitalist attempts to reduce humans to cogs in the machine, to use Marx's phrase. However, Negt and Kluge tend to speak indifferently of 'obstinacy,' of a 'materialist instinct,' of a 'block of real life,' of 'fantasy,' something that can confuse the reader and complicate the comprehension of their account of the consciousness industry. If we are to understand exactly the role assigned by Negt and Kluge to the consciousness industry, and the dialectic between it and its 'raw material'—people's consciousness,

[288] Richard Langston, *Visions of Violence. German Avant-Gardes After Fascism.* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2008), 50. See also DuM II, 368.

their somatic impulses, and their unconscious energies—then, we need to clarify what is the relation between those terms, as well as provide a more comprehensive definition of 'fantasy,' a key term in Negt and Kluge's account of the consciousness industry.

Simply put, 'obstinacy' is the generic name Negt and Kluge use to talk about all those energies that emanate from processes of separation: between producers and the means of production, between individuals' experience and the symbols that provide meaning to their contexts of living, between people's needs and the material that could fulfil them. In this sense, as we have seen, obstinacy has been rendered as a sense-of-self, a feeling of autonomy that remains, however, detached from reality and history, and thus can easily become arbitrary. Matthew Miller provides a very clear definition of obstinacy (or *Eigensinn*), which, he writes,

> denotes a claim to one's own senses and sense alike, the possession and enjoyment of which is continuously expropriated over the course of economic history's separation of producers from the means of production and of social history's concomitant configuration of sense-experience as well as meaning.[289]

Fantasy, which Negt and Kluge characterize as a "practical unconscious critique of alienation," (PSE, 33) is closely related to obstinacy (even if Negt and Kluge do not explicitly link them) and can be understood, initially, as one of the ways in which the latter is articulated in people's unconscious.

This becomes clear in *Public Sphere and Experience*, where fantasy appears as 'a [manifestation] of an "inverted consciousness" and as such [an] expression of the truth of an inverted world.'[290] Pavsek here captures the two-sided nature of fantasy which, just like obstinacy, has a moment of truth insofar

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[289] Matthew D. Miller, '*Eigensinn* in Transit. Reexamining a Concept for the Twenty-First Century,' in *Glass Shards: Echoes of a Message in a Bottle. Alexander Kluge-Jahrbuch, vol. 2*, 88-89.

[290] These are Pavsek's words. See Pavsek, *The Utopia of Film*, 185.

as it expresses the wrongness of this alienating world. Fantasy, however (again like obstinacy) is not just an expression of truth, since "[i]n its unsublated form," as Negt and Kluge write, it acts "as a *mere* libidinal counterweight to unbearable, alienated relations," and as such remains "*merely* an expression of this alienation." (PSE, 33. My emphasis.) Further exhibiting its relation to the concept of 'obstinacy' (which Negt and Kluge were yet to develop when they wrote *Public Sphere and Experience*) they speak of a form of 'balance labour' performed by this unconscious capacity. Fantasy, then, develops as a way to compensate for the ruptures in the subject's self-regulation. The reality constructed by the linear, unidirectional, and repetitive logic of capitalism could not be sustained without some form of 'compensation,' Negt and Kluge claim. Fantasy, in this first sense, is but an 'obstinate' reaction against alienation.

Besides acting as "a necessary compensation for the experience of the alienated labor process," fantasy is also described by Negt and Kluge as a capacity where living labour has been able to preserve its *own* mode of production—one that functions differently from the linear, one-directional, and a-temporal mode of production of capitalism. (PSE, 32-33) Fantasy is therefore described as a multi-layered type of cognitive activity—a synthesis which can produce a full experience—that opposes the reductive, instrumental forms of cognition furthered by capitalism. In this second sense, as Pavsek argues, 'fantasy' can be related to the Kantian concept of the 'imagination'—a connection that Negt and Kluge, however, do not explicitly make.[291] Briefly, for Kant 'imagination' had two forms—reproductive and productive—both of which point toward a capacity that is able to synthesize

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[291] Pavsek traces a relation to Kant, but yet, the link between 'fantasy' [*Phantasie*] and the Kantian concept of 'imagination' [*Einbildungskraft*] is not made by Kluge or Negt. See Pavsek, *The Utopia of Film*, 161. The link can be justified, however, insofar as both act as forms of synthesizing concepts and intuitions. See Alexander Kluge, Edgar Reitz, and Wilfried Reinke, "Word and Film,' trans. Miriam Hansen, *October* 46 (Autumn 1988): 87-88, where this link is hinted towards.

between sense perceptions and the understanding. As such, it can be rendered as a form of mediation that connects intuitions and concepts, according to its own, *a priori* "laws of association."[292] Fantasy, in this sense, is a capacity that can help avoid both the blindness of pure sense perception *and* the impulse toward objectification that forgets its underlying sensual basis.[293] When correctly utilized, fantasy can connect the sensual and the conceptual, avoiding the former's blindness and the latter's emptiness—to use Kant's lexicon—and *generate a full experience of reality*.[294]

The connection between fantasy's first and second use in Negt and Kluge's work—i.e. as a reaction against alienation and as a capacity with its own mode of production—can be made by stating that when fantasy (*qua* capacity) operates using reified, pre-given concepts, or when it loses its connection to the 'reality principle,' *then* it easily becomes powerless, merely a counterweight to alienation, merely a form of escapism.[295] This is the danger that the consciousness industry poses. Hence why, in a capitalist society, even while fantasy exposes the persistence of protest, it requires orientation. As Langston puts it, fantasy "is only potent when [the] organizational structures of

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[292] Pavsek here is drawing from Rudolf Eisler, *Kant-Lexikon: Nachschlagewerk zu Kants sämtlichen Schriften, Briefen und handschriftlichem Nachlass*, (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1961), 105.

[293] See Kluge, et. al., 'Word and Film,' 87-88. There, speaking of (a utopian) film, the claim is made that it can combine "the radical concreteness of its materials with the conceptual possibilities of montage." For Kluge this function mirrors the way fantasy works, hence his insistence that film only objectifies the way the human mind functions. "The stream of associations which is the basis of thinking and feeling … has all the qualities of cinema. And everything you can do with your mind and your senses, you can do in the cinema." Alexander Kluge in Jan Dawson, 'Alexander Kluge interviewed by Jan Dawson,' *Film Comment,* (November–December 1974): 54.

[294] See also in this vein Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 122-123, and AT, 363, where Adorno notes the centrality of the capacity of the imagination for the artwork.

[295] Note, however, that even in this sense it preserves its truth content. To use Adorno's words, even when it acts as an 'escape' it is more than that. Speaking of the imagination, Adorno writes: "What transcends the reality principle toward something superior is always also part of what is beneath it; to point a taunting finger at it is malicious." (AT, 11)

everyday consciousness . . . are disabled."[296] Within a society ordered following the logic of capitalism (and an imperative to act 'realistically,' to delay gratification, to act consistently) there is no much room for the workings of fantasy.[297] As Negt and Kluge contend, because it is multi-layered and polymorphous, "[t]he quantifying time of the production process, which is composed of nothing but linear units of time linked functionally with one another, is generally hostile to fantasy." (PSE, 34)

Its 'otherness' vis-à-vis a reality structured following an instrumental logic, and its suppression from interfering in the construction of what is 'real,' is, on the one hand, what makes fantasy a critical power, a source for resistance. On the other hand, however, this also makes fantasy relatively powerless and vulnerable. (PSE, 34) Powerless since, in its 'raw' state, it remains incommunicable.[298] As such, Negt and Kluge contend, it remains a force that "will not [stir subjects] to action." (PSE, 26) Thus, fantasy needs to be 'translated' back to reality. But it is also vulnerable since it remains prone to being captured ('translated') by either the ideology of political forces (e.g. the alt-right, populism), or by the ideology of the consciousness industry. Both of these separate fantasy as a capacity that could trigger the generation of experience (*Erfahrung*) from the production process, and exploit it for their own purposes, thus blocking its emancipatory potential. (PSE, 36)[299]

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296 Langston, *Visions of Violence*, 51.

297 This is also the reason why today, in a society permeated by capitalism, fantasy has preserved its 'negative' connotation (as a flight of fancy)—"a consigned to the realm of the unconscious and proscribed from knowledge as a childish, injudicious rudiment" as Adorno writes—while losing its link to judgment and knowledge. See Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 122-123.

298 See Michael Bray, 'Openness as a Form of Closure: Public Sphere, Social Class, and Alexander Kluge's Counterproducts,' *Telos* 159, (Summer 2012): 156.

299 Let me note that Negt and Kluge tend to preserve something from Kant's transcendental understanding of fantasy/imagination as an a priori category, just as their account of labour capacities and self-regulation tends to preserve something of the early Marx's humanism. Thus, there is a danger that they appeal to a metaphysical foundation of the human being that can never be absolutely distorted by society or history. There is evidence for

Nevertheless, Negt and Kluge's analysis of the consciousness industry shows that, in its attempt to manipulate and profit from fantasy, this industry becomes a double-edged sword for capitalism. In its attempt to appropriate and valorize the workings of fantasy (and thus people's real needs and interests) it can, indeed, extract more surplus. Because this industry is now able to address fantasy *in its multilayered character* (and thus capture the attention of otherwise excluded groups), it can now multiply the number of cultural consumers. But in doing so, it also preserves fantasy's qualitative character, and what is more, it 'translates' it back from the nether reaches of the unconscious. As such, it provides many otherwise-excluded groups with the symbolic tools to articulate their own needs and interests, allowing fantasy to eventually, in Langston's words,

> transcend its normative status as a mere expression of alienation . . . [and] also probe the gap between the victim's suffering body and the perpetrators who are culpable for that suffering.[300]

II) The Consciousness Industry and Fantasy: Articulation and Public Visibility

In order to develop the idea of the public spheres of production—and its core, the consciousness industry—Negt and Kluge propose to focus on the changes in people's consciousness and their

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this, especially in their early work (although it would be more accurate to speak of a 'naturalism'). Speaking of the valorization of fantasy, e.g., they write in *Public Sphere*: "The theory of the preservation of psychic energy is applicable in this case. It cannot be expanded any more than can a plot of land." (PSE, 183) Yet, as noted in chapter II section I.2, fantasy (*qua* synthesizing capacity) also develops historically and socially, and thus cannot be seen as part of the 'ontological' and unchanging base of the human being. Hence why it can be distorted by the consciousness industry, and why (according to Kluge, as I discuss below) we need to develop an emancipatory aesthetic practice. This is perhaps one of the contentious issues in Negt and Kluge's work and would require further scrutiny to be defended as a non-essentialist naturalism. I return to this in the conclusions of this work.

[300] Langston, *Visions of Violence*, 53.

everyday experience, as brought about by what Habermas had called the 'structural transformation of the public sphere.'[301] As Knödler-Bunte writes, what Negt and Kluge manage to do with this approach is to analyse, not only the ways in which capitalism devises new ways to appropriate people's capacities, but the impact this has "on concrete human experience and psychic structure."[302] This goes in line with the approach they were to use later in *History and Obstinacy*.

II.1 Pluralism and the Consciousness Industry

Negt and Kluge start from the realization that capitalist societies can no longer be considered homogeneous. The increased cultural socialization brought about by changes in economic, cultural, and intellectual processes created new kinds of individualism and new forms of living under which a pluralism of cultural values and forms of life has flourished, in a process Axel Honneth describes as "an increase in the number of personal qualities, in other words, the fact of a pluralization of life-styles made possible by the modern money economy."[303] The populations of modern capitalist societies, especially after the Second World War, became more pluralistic and diverse, a transformation that, in the process, opens up the possibilities for new forms of individual development.[304] This pluralization of life-styles, and consequently, of needs and interests, would seem to clash with one of the central mechanisms of the 'culture industry,' as described by Adorno: "Culture today is infecting everything with sameness," Adorno and Horkheimer write. (DE, 94)

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[301] See Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, chapter V, for Habermas' account of this transformation.
[302] Eberhard Knödler-Bunte, 'The Proletarian Public Sphere and Political Organization: An Analysis of Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge's *The Public Sphere and Experience,' New German Critique*, No. 4 (Winter, 1975): 51.
[303] Axel Honneth, 'Organized Self-Realization. Some Paradoxes of Individualization,' *European Journal of Social Theory* 7 (4), (2004): 465.
[304] Honneth, 'Organized Self-Realization,' 468.

According to Negt and Kluge, in contrast, the 'mechanism of exclusion' whereby the culture industry sacrifices distinctions, and whereby consumers "compulsively imitate" what commodities dictate to them (DE, 136)—i.e. its capacity to homogenize and standardize interests and needs by fitting them within a (falsely) universal discourse—cannot function under the aforementioned conditions.[305] Arguably, these changes could be seen as one of the reasons why Adorno, in his late work, speculated about the impossibility to equate 'culture industry' with 'consumer consciousness.'[306]

Negt and Kluge's concept of the 'consciousness industry' aims to capture the ways in which the culture industry transformed itself in order to respond to the aforementioned social changes. According to them, the consciousness industry (as part of the new public spheres of production) is, in the first place, characterized by the "[tendency] to incorporate private realms, in particular the production process and the context of living." (PSE, 13) In a sense, then, it continues with the logic of capitalism and of the culture industry. Its aim is still to 'colonize' those social spheres that had been so far organized following their own logic—for example the family, early child education, or that of intellectual labour (including the labour of fantasy). Further, the consciousness industry embraces "the pure interests of capital," and thus express the "overarching production apparatus." (PSE, 14) As Hansen puts this, this industry 'no longer [pretends] to a separate sphere above the marketplace but

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[305] See Theodor Adorno, 'Scientific Experiences of a European Scholar in America,' in *Critical Models*, 222: "The phenomena that concern the sociology of mass media, especially in America, cannot be separated from standardization, the transformation of artistic creations into consumer goods, calculated pseudo-individualization, and similar manifestations of what German philosophy calls 'reification.' Corresponding to it is a reified, largely manipulable consciousness, hardly capable any longer of spontaneous experience." See also, e.g. Howard Koval, 'Homogenization of culture in capitalist society,' *Popular Music and Society*, 12:1, (1988): 1-2.

[306] Adorno, 'Free Time,' 175: "Apparently the integration of consciousness and free time has not yet wholly succeeded."

[is] an "immediate expression" of the process of production.'[307] In these respects, Negt and Kluge's observations do not differ substantially from Adorno's, who had already argued that the system of the culture industry no longer had to appeal to the semblance of legitimacy provided by art. "Films and radio no longer need to present themselves as art," Adorno and Horkheimer write. "The truth that they are nothing but business is used as an ideology to legitimize the trash they intentionally produce." (DE, 95) For Negt and Kluge, just as for Adorno, the consciousness industry is, first and foremost, an *industry*, one that uses culture to produce consciousness.

However, for Negt and Kluge, the consciousness industry differs in one important respect from the culture industry—namely, in the way it carries forth those processes of integration. According to them, the consciousness industry—given the pluralization of constituencies, interests, and forms of life—can no longer succeed in the attempt to subsume and homogenize people's consumption interests. Hence why it starts to follow what Hansen has called a 'maximum of inclusion.'[308] It is no longer the case that mass culture, as Habermas also contended in his study of the 'decline' of bourgeois culture and its public sphere, could simply increase its sales by providing entertainment addressed to the lowest common denominator, something that assumed "a consumer strata with relatively little education." (STPS, 165) In short, for Negt and Kluge, it could no longer be contended that, e.g., culture was "lowered to [the level] of the masses," (STPS, 166) or that the culture industry "prepares" substitute gratifications in order to reproduce mass deception. (CIR, 18)[309]

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[307] Hansen, 'Foreword,' xxix.

[308] Hansen, 'Foreword,' xxx.

[309] Note that Habermas himself later on observed that there had been a multiplication of educational options which was "paired with a considerable expansion of the options for individual self-discovery and self-reflection." Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, vol. 2. Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, trans. Thomas McCarthy, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987): 389-390. See also Honneth, 'Organized Self-Realization,' 469.

At the most superficial level, then, the difference between Negt and Kluge's and the analyses of their predecessors is simply historical. As it has been shown, at the time Adorno and Horkheimer published their essay on 'The Culture Industry,' which focused on radio and on the Hollywood industry, this industry was still 'vertically integrated'—only a handful of studios or broadcasting agencies existed, and managed the production, distribution, and exhibition of their products.[310] Technologies like the LP or the cassette industry were non-existent or still in their infancy, and thus, for example, music singles that could target a variety of publics were still to be broadly developed.[311] The economic boom of the 1950s and 1960s came with technological advances which, along with the concentration of different media, allowed, as Knödler-Bunte argues, for the development of "new ways to transmit information and to set up distribution and planning systems on a large industrial scale."[312] This allows the new public spheres of production and the consciousness industry to target individual needs and interests *in their individuality*:

> Their programs do not merely comprise an abstract all-purpose package ("to whom it may concern") but are able to make individualized needs, the needs of target groups, and thereby whole contexts of living, the object of a focused opportunity for exploitation. (PSE, 155)

It so happens that technological advances transform what Adorno could still construe as a homogeneous system into one, still unified by the interest in profit, but much more capable of addressing individual needs and target fantasy in its polymorphic and multi-layered character. Thus,

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[310] See Simon During (ed.), *The Cultural Studies Reader,* (London: Routledge, 2001): 32.

[311] During, *The Cultural Studies Reader*, 32. See also PSE, 150-151; 154.

[312] Knödler-Bunte, 'The Proletarian Public Sphere and Political Organization,' 72. See PSE, 154-156.

while the consciousness industry *still* creates consumers and functions for the purposes of the capitalist market,[313] what Negt and Kluge emphasize is a qualitative change in *how* it does this.

For example, Adorno could still speak of standardization. In this case, as Paddison writes, "a piece is totally made up of easily recognisable and (through frequent repetition) generally accepted formulae, within an overall scheme which remains always basically the same."[314] Now there is Spotify—a streaming music service that can make 'personalized' playlists using algorithms. People no longer need to turn on the radio and listen to the same hits that everyone else does. Rather, they listen to something attuned to 'their' tastes and needs.[315] Companies like Netflix or YouTube do this with the visual media. Cinema, instead of being monopolized by Hollywood, is now produced independently and in a wide variety of settings and contexts. Cinemas are thus able to screen ten or twenty different films—each addressing, and as we will see, constructing, a different public. Or a brand like *Nike* starts making specific population-targeted adds (one addressing Black people, other the LGBTQ community, one for women, and so forth) in a move lauded as a commodification of identity politics.[316] This pluralization of means and media—whose explosion today makes Negt and Kluge's

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[313] Hence why their analysis, which always keeps in mind that capitalism is the background of cultural production, differs from those of some 'cultural' theories which—in the urgency to emphasise that we can "deal creatively with the cultural products"—all too easily affirm abstract values like "pleasure, identity, imagination, and even "decoding" and "creativity."" Imre Szeman, 'The Limits of Culture: The Frankfurt School and/for Cultural Studies,' in *Rethinking the Frankfurt School. Alternative Legacies of Cultural Critique*, eds. Jeffrey T. Nealon and Caren Irr, (New York: SUNY Press, 2002), 66-67. Szeman's essay does a very good job in showing the necessity of bringing back the concern with culture as a *product* of capitalism in order to properly understand its 'emancipatory' character.

[314] Max Paddison, 'The Critique Criticised: Adorno and Popular Music,' *Popular Music*, Vol. 2, (1982): 206.

[315] Importantly, as I argue below, it does not matter that these tastes or needs are not (yet) autonomously constituted, but that, in providing more diversity, the industry facilitates subjects with symbolic materials with which to interpret and (re)construct their needs.

[316] Recently, e.g., *Nike* used the face of NFL's player Colin Kaepernick, who took the knee during several games to show support for the protests against police brutality, in an ad under which one could read: "Believe in something.

analysis even more relevant—allows the consciousness industry to exploit and co-opt people's capacities in their particularity, instead of having to target a 'general' interest.

The point here is not to argue that the consciousness industry now addresses the true or authentic needs of individuals—those interests and needs are indeed constructed historically and contextually, in a hegemonic struggle between the audiences and capital. With Nancy Fraser, Negt and Kluge could be said to contend that needs are interpretively constructed and, as such, objects of a (political) struggle whereby these are legitimated.[317] As Fraser argues, then, needs do not form a coherent web, nor are there 'true' needs or an epistemic superiority to establish what counts as one. Instead, as she writes:

> discourses about needs typically make at least implicit reference to alternative interpretations. Particular claims about needs ... implicitly or explicitly [evoke] resonances of competing need interpretations. They therefore allude to a conflict of need interpretations.[318]

Negt and Kluge's claims should be read in this vein. Their assumption is not that there are some pre-given needs or interests that the consciousness industry can now cater to. These needs are, as for Fraser, constructed politically. What they claim, rather, is that this industry no longer tries to streamline the psychic organization toward *one* interest that "presents itself as the whole," (PSE, 185)

Even if it means sacrificing everything. Just Do It." Similar stunts have been used to capture the women's 'market,' under the banners of female empowerment and confidence. See Sarah Banet-Weiser, 'Nike, Colin Kaepernick, and the history of "commodity activism,"' *Vox*, September 7, 2018, https://www.vox.com/first-person/2018/9/7/17831334/nike-colin-kaepernick-ad.

[317] See Nancy Fraser, 'Talking about Needs: Interpretive Contests as Political Conflicts in Welfare-State Societies,' *Ethics* 99, (January 1989). As we will see, this struggle, for Negt and Kluge as for Fraser, must be decided in the public sphere.

[318] Fraser, 'Talking about Needs,' 295.

but allows for much more flexibility. Contrary to the "technical enlistment of the human brain," the pluralism of the consciousness industry provides much more room for psychic play. (PSE, 185) In doing so, it provides material that can *then* be used by the public to question and (re)construct 'competing need interpretations,' to allude to Fraser.

Crucially, as Hansen argues, the consciousness industry does this because of its tendency to valorize and accumulate everything. In this case, the drive for profit pushes the consciousness industry to absorb areas of life that used to be "bracketed from representation" and "cater to social constituencies that had not been considered before as a public."[319] Hence why with the increasing purchasing power of, say, youth cultures, women, Black or Latino minorities, comes more cultural representation. These sub-groups become the addressees of specific cultural and consumer niches, something that—as I argue in more detail below—also makes them (more) aware of their own cultural diversity and of their specific interests. By integrating them into the market, capitalism can integrate them *as consumers*. However, what from the economic perspective appears as homogenization appears, *when viewed from the perspective of culture*, as pluralism and diversity.

Is this, as critics like Naomi Klein have argued, merely "carnival on the surface, consolidation underneath, where it counts"?[320] Negt and Kluge would not deny this claim (the pluralization does help the economic interests of capitalism), and yet, they would question whether there is not some potential in that carnivalesque pluralization 'at the surface.' For Negt and Kluge, culture must not be construed as a sheer reflection of the economic base, i.e. as a mere surface level, and because of that, transformations that emanate from culture can become structurally undermining for capitalism.[321] As

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[319] Hansen, 'Foreword,' xxx.

[320] Naomi Klein, *No Logo: No Space, No Choice, No Jobs*, (New York: Picador, 2002), 130.

[321] As I argue in Chapters V and VI below, this does not mean that one should be content with reaching only cultural

we will see below, cultural pluralism and diversity can have an emancipatory power, a power that, partly, is due to their capacity to trigger thought processes that can lead to critique (and that cannot be deemed as mere constructions of the consciousness industry.)

II.2 The Articulation of Fantasy

To comprehend the emancipatory potential embedded in the consciousness industry, we need to focus on two central aspects of Negt and Kluge's account. First, there is the fact that, while the consciousness industry does shape hegemonic need-interpretations, it cannot itself produce people's psychic energies or their fantasy. In doing so, furthermore, it provides their otherwise repressed fantasies and energies with a concrete form. Second, and relatedly, it manages to give different audiences—previously excluded or marginalized—public visibility, providing them with the symbolic and expressive tools with which to reappropriate (and eventually reconstruct) those needs.

In the first place then, Negt and Kluge's criticism of the 'new' media through which the consciousness industry operates is predicated on the contention that these media cannot produce people's needs and fantasies, but only 'seduce' them, so-to-speak, something that, as we will see, it does through the appearance of commodities—or what they call their 'fantasy value.' Negt and Kluge here extend Adorno's criticism of the culture industry's 'commodity fetishism,' according to which the exchange-value replaced the use-value, thus making the labour and the history that went into the object's production 'vanish' behind its appearance.[322] But to do this, the commodity has to be

changes, and that, therefore, one can forget the economic and material dimensions of society.

[322] Adorno, 'On the Fetish Character in Music,' 38.

presented as something that still possesses a value for the consumer, reason for which the focus of attention shifts to its 'appearance,' to its 'aesthetic' value.

For Adorno, this aesthetic aspect of the commodity was problematic because, through it, cultural commodities could emphasize their 'authenticity,' thereby seducing individuals and reproducing them as consumers. At this point, "aesthetic appearance becomes a function of the character of the commodity" which "strives unceasingly to spirit away own origins in human labour ... in order to further the cause of exchange value."[323] Adorno had already noted that it was the consumer's labour which had "literally 'made' the success which he reifies." And yet, according to him, when acting as a consumer the consumer was rendered passive, with little autonomy or agency left. The consumer, according to this, merely "accepts [this success] as an objective criterion, without recognizing himself in it."[324] For Negt and Kluge, who start from similar premises, things are not so straightforward.

Negt and Kluge appeal to W.F. Haug's 'commodity aesthetics,' and define the 'fantasy value' of the commodity as that which—once its use-value becomes secondary—allows the product to 'seduce' the consumer. "[S]omething doubled will be produced in all commodity production: first, the use-value, second and in addition to this, the appearance of use-value."[325] It is no coincidence that Negt and Kluge call this the *fantasy*-value of the commodity since, according to them, there is an elective affinity between this and the fantasies already produced by the individuals. This is something spelled out most clearly throughout Kluge's writings on film and the media, where he repeats the idea

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323 Theodor Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, (London: Verso, 2009), 79.

324 Adorno, 'On the Fetish Character in Music,' 38.

325 Wolfgang Fritz Haug, *Kritik der Warenästhetik*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1971): 16. Cited in PSE, 172.

that the means of production of the consciousness industry belong to the spectators: it is their experience, fantasies, thoughts, which constitute it. Kluge writes:

> [T]elevision, video corporations, the radio and the cinema consider themselves to be the media. In fact they are merely the *forms* and conditions under which the media exist. The true medium of experience, of desires, of phantasies, and actually of aesthetic appreciation as well, are the real human beings and never the specialists.[326]

According to Negt and Kluge, similarly, the media only feed on the (intellectual, cognitive) labour of the spectators, and in doing so, what is more, they "reflect something which depends on being filled out by the spectators from their own experience."[327]

Negt and Kluge are aware that the consciousness industry *is* problematic since it anchors down people's fantasies, in the attempt to block the transformation of its obstinate potential into forms of autonomous consciousness. This happens through what they call an 'inward imperialism,' since it depends on the accumulation of people's desires and expectations. The consciousness industry, thus, merely reproduces the capitalist logic of primitive accumulation at a new level, since it now makes people's *consciousness and their unconscious life* its raw material: "[A]long with the whole field of leisure, human consciousness itself becomes a target for exploitation." (PSE, 180-181) This is a problem, since it performs this appropriation of human needs, fantasies and desires, in order to fit them into a specific framework. Our fantasy, our imagination, all of our obstinate traits, are anchored by the industry. We spend our free time daydreaming about living the life promised by perfume adverts, and even if at

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[326] Kluge, 'On Film and the Public Sphere,' 36.

[327] Kluge, 'On Film and the Public Sphere,' 36.

some level we know this is beyond our reach, it still provides us a sense of relief, that balance that we require in order not to run away:

> The libidinal fantasies of human beings, their hopes, wishes, needs, are no longer set free, are no longer capable of developing themselves in accordance with random interests, but are concretely occupied with use-values, with commodities. (PSE, 172)

Thus, fantasy, where the emancipatory power of obstinacy was safeguarded, is tied down to specific fantasy-values, hence limiting people's experience in ways that suit the prevailing power relations and thus reproduce the *status quo*.

But even here Negt and Kluge notice a potential gap in the logic of capitalism. This is related to the aforementioned fact that the consciousness industry does not 'construct' people's needs, but can only try to provide them with a 'false' orientation. For Negt and Kluge, given the proliferation of social groups—and thus of needs and interests—the consciousness industry cannot merely 'sell' individuals *whatever it wants*, imposing a pre-produced, generalized object, but rather—in order to turn these otherwise excluded groups into their consumers—through the fantasy-value of the commodity, it *must touch upon what the subjects want*. As Kluge puts it, "the medium is the spectator; all media can only borrow from this substance."[328] In the attempt to constitute people's experience of their contexts of living, therefore, the consciousness industry is actually articulating what remained obscure to the subjects (what for Negt and Kluge is preserved in the form of 'fantasy'). In its attempt to capture a diversity of experiences to valorize them, this industry allows for an enrichment of their experience.

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[328] Alexander Kluge (ed.), *Bestandsaufnahme: Die Utopie Film,* (Frankfurt am Main: Zweitausendeins, 1983), 101. See also Miriam Hansen, 'Reinventing the Nickelodeon: Notes on Kluge and Early Cinema,' in *Alexander Kluge. Raw Materials*, 393.

Capitalism, in its tendency toward the realization of surplus value, tries to reduce the individual's organization to one single interest. (PSE, 185) But given the plurality and multi-layered nature of human capacities and experiences, this is not possible: "Since the development of social wealth cannot be separated from individual enrichment of human beings, the diverse types of human energies cannot be realized if they remain merely specialized." (PSE, 83) Hence why capitalism must enlist the services of the consciousness industry, through which it tries to absorb people's energy. But because these energies are people's own, even while distracting people, providing false forms of satisfying their balance economy, their fantasy is enriched. (PSE, 173)[329] Note that, in line with the argument made above, what is enriched are people's energies (their fantasy in this case), which preserve a degree of heterodoxy. The needs built with them are always historically and socially mediated.

We could think, for example, of the way homosexuals used popular mass culture in order to create a sense of identity and community among them. As Daniel Harris has recounted, the gay community started to 'deify' certain film stars, in something that a critic like Adorno would have diagnosed as a cult of personality and as a buying-into Hollywood's star system.[330] According to Harris, however, "[t]he deification of certain film stars became a way of actually bringing us together when there were no political leaders to help us accomplish that. So that Judy Garland and Bette Davis were *de facto* political leaders."[331] Formerly atomized and excluded from having public visibility or any role

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329 'Human beings are subject in this case not merely to a "seduction" that is external to them, for the libidinal forces that impel them toward the commodity nexus are their own. Their imaginative faculty is distracted and simultaneously enriched.' (PSE, 173)

330 See, for example, Diane Waldman, 'Critical Theory and Film: Adorno and the "Culture Industry" Revisited,' *New German Critique*, No. 12, (Autumn, 1977): 42.

331 Daniel Harris, in '"The Consciousness Industry": A Symposium,' *Salmagundi*, No. 118/119 (Spring-Summer 1998): 133.

in the public sphere, popular culture thus allowed homosexuals to form connections, and to become a public. "We used [mass art] as the vehicle for identification and communication," he writes. "And that's not nothing."[332]

Of course, it was also the case that *Diesel* started to produce ads with kissing men, *Virgin Cola* produced "the first-ever gay wedding featured in a commercial," and there emerged gay-targeted brands such as *Pride Beer* and *Wave Water* (whose slogan was "We label bottles not people"), as Naomi Klein accounts.[333] The gay community became a new site from which more consumers could emerge, thus reproducing the logic of capitalism. But for many gays, who otherwise had no representation or no cultural icons, even seeing those ads would have produced a sense of recognition of their otherwise repressed identities.

Similarly, Diedrich Diederichsen contends that pop music fans were able to appropriate signs promoted in order to manipulate them ideologically, but "attached them to new meanings, to the promises of freedom embodied in economic prosperity (youth with money), individual liberation (existentialism), and democratization (civil rights movement)."[334] Those promises were not products of the industry—merely the forms in which they appeared. Pop fans are more than aware that they are working with contingent, even corrupted material, Diederichsen argues. But they are also aware that, because they are excluded from the dominant culture, they need to take back the means of expression available, however corrupted.

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332 Harris, '"The Consciousness Industry": A Symposium,' 133.

333 See Klein, *No Logo*, 112.

334 Diederich Diederichsen, 'The Adequacy of Signs: Adorno versus Jazz and Pop,' in *Adorno. The Possibility of the Impossible*, eds. Nicolaus Schafhausen, et. al., (New York: Lukas and Sternberg, 2004), 42.

As the above illustrates, the centrality of the consciousness industry's emancipatory potential lies in the fact that it can become a site—a public sphere—where spectators can encounter their own needs and interests objectified in front of them, needs which would otherwise remain abstract, unconscious, repressed. Fredric Jameson has relatedly argued that mass culture's manipulation of consciousness can function "only after its object—trauma, charged memory, guilty or threatening desire, anxiety—has in some way been aroused, and *risks emerging into the subject's consciousness*."[335] Jameson's claim helps clarify Negt and Kluge's argument: namely, that the ideology of the culture industry only works if it recognizes the content which it wishes to suppress. Thus, in mass culture subjects can encounter their 'own' needs, interests and fantasies, in the shape of recurring themes and images that the culture industry displays in order to capture more consumers. But they can also (re)appropriate those themes and images and reconstruct those needs and interests, making them *more* of their own.

Contrary to the common reading of the culture industry, Negt and Kluge argue that the consciousness industry can appropriate people's fantasies, *but not dictate how they are produced*—hence why for them it "merely seizes an opportunity." (PSE, 172) What is blocked is their orientation. Instead of allowing the development of the human being as something more than labour power, they provide false exits—temporary forms of balance that allow the subject to gain certain sense of satisfaction. But these exits turn out to be not so false after all, since ultimately, the fantasies are steered back from their abstract subjectivity into reality, into the public sphere. And as such, these become tangible—since those intuitions which without concepts would remain blind—repressed by the

[335] Jameson, 'Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture,' 141. My emphasis.

hegemonic public sphere—now have some 'forms' which allow individuals to articulate them, and thus to reconstruct their needs, wishes, or interests.

The (inadvertent) 'emancipatory' role of the consciousness industry, according to Negt and Kluge, lies in its ability to give a concrete expression and making publicly available the contents of subjects' fantasy, which otherwise would remain a "practical unconscious critique of alienation." (PSE, 33) Furthermore, as we will see below in more detail,[336] because this articulation happens in a public setting, individuals will be able to further develop their needs—through the recognition of their shared and social character, which will allow them to then get together with other individuals with shared interests—turning them into collective political demands.

III) <u>The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism: Obstinacy and the Gap between Self-Realization and Discipline</u>

In his film *The Assault of the Present on the Rest of Time* (1985), Kluge reflects upon the contradictions that permeate the new media and the consciousness industry. As Kluge explains there, the consciousness industry has become a machinery that can capture and shape people's fantasies, and yet this industry can do little to materially satisfy people's needs and wishes—which it can only reflect and valorize, in what Pavsek calls "yet another step in the further leveling and reduction of the human capacity for imagination, yet another subtraction from the richness of actuality."[337] Nevertheless, as we have seen, insofar as this industry can materialize people's fantasies, it retains an emancipatory (or what Kluge calls 'utopian') potential. For Negt and Kluge, this potential emerges from the incapacity

[336] I focus on this especially on Chapter IV below.

[337] Pavsek, *The Utopia of Film*, 211.

of the consciousness industry to fulfil the promises it makes, something that for them points toward a contradiction that emerges when capitalism starts attempting to valorize people's fantasies, and which I reconstruct below. "Much of what the superfluous people in this country dream of will not fit into this project [of the new media]" Kluge's voice-over states in the aforementioned film. But where others might sense a tone of resignation, as Pavsek has rightly noted, Kluge's voice-over actually exudes hope.

The contradiction is seen by Negt and Kluge to be the following: as long as traditional forms of material exploitation and the appropriation of people's labour prevail—what they call 'primary' exploitation—capitalism must demand of workers to think and behave 'rationally,' which in this case means instrumentally, delaying immediate gratification, being efficient and productive. "Individual needs, however sketchily developed," Negt and Kluge write, "are directed toward more rapid production and more rapid exchange, toward the reproduction of labor power." (PSE, 183) Capitalism thus makes the subject convince itself to perform tasks that go against its self-regulating logic, and in order to do so, what they call balance labour must be performed. The subject, that is, must produce itself as a *labouring* subject, and this requires self-discipline and subjection. However, as we have seen in the previous chapter, the libidinal economy cannot be fully rationalized: "The overall organization of the human being resists being reduced to one interest that presents itself as the whole." (PSE, 185) This resistance emerges in its fantasies, a form of "necessary compensation for the experience of the alienated labor process." (PSE, 33) These are then captured by the consciousness industry, in what Negt and Kluge call 'secondary' exploitation—i.e. the appropriation of their cognitive capacities via the consciousness industry.

Crucially, the consciousness industry promises self-realization, the creative unfolding of capacities, freedom of movement and choice, all which are denied within the sphere of capitalist

labour.[338] Thus, the interests of primary exploitation move in the opposite direction to those of the consciousness industry's secondary exploitation. The former demands rationalization and repression, forcing the subject to streamline itself with the rationalizing logic of capitalism; the latter provides libidinal gratification and promises immediate satisfaction. The problem is that, insofar as private forms of the accumulation of labour and of material exploitation persist, the worldviews and promises made in the mass media cannot be fulfilled. The subject's consciousness is thus torn into two parts, since the mass media, against the interests of capital, compels its object (people's consciousness) to go beyond the *status quo*. As Negt and Kluge write, "[t]he promise of the commodity world, which under the existing conditions of appropriation cannot be fulfilled, leads people's consciousness to extend beyond the borders of this commodity world." (PSE, 173-174)

The consciousness industry suggests a worldview, a nexus of meaning that makes promises and presents illusions that touch upon people's own fantasies. People are reminded, through the constant encounter with the appearance value of commodities, of everything that technological advances have made possible, but whose realisation the relations of production block. Thousands of products claim to be able to satisfy our needs and desires (through advertisements, film, and so forth) and nevertheless individuals do not find satisfaction. New needs and desires quickly replace the previous ones, and the sense of dissatisfaction or alienation lingers on—showing that those 'industrially produced' needs and desires are not attuned to people's energies, that they do not truly provide the self-realization they promise.

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[338] As Negt and Kluge put it, the "consciousness industry simultaneously—although motivated by an independent profit interest—makes the human brain into the object of its valorization." (PSE, 183)

Importantly, this confrontation with the projections of our needs, according to Negt and Kluge, has pushed the subjects toward what they call, following Lothar Hack, a 'new immediacy'. As they argue,

> the postponement of drives in the interest of long-term success is no longer unproblematically accepted ... needs must be satisfied immediately, because one perceives that the material possibility for satisfying them is present. (PSE, 156)

The "permanent evocation of sensual needs"—displayed every time subjects log on to Facebook, ride public transport, or turn toward the horizon of their cityscape, permeated by advertisements—pushes people into questioning the legitimacy of many prevalent but unnecessarily repressive social structures such as workplace discipline, or the false promises of politicians and of the culture industry itself.

Despite the fragmentation of experience, what Negt and Kluge call the 'new media' therefore allow individuals to gain a certain picture (if still incomplete) of the social whole, and therefore to question the traditional methods that kept them attached to exploitative and alienating forms of labour.[339] The capitalist work ethic begins to lose its psychic base, Negt and Kluge argue (in similar terms to Daniel Bell's *Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*). The traditional forms of repression and exploitation (delay of satisfaction, pressure form the workplace's hierarchical structure, rationalized

[339] When referring to the 'new media' Kluge and Negt were referring to a stage where individual media (radio, television, film, print) were beginning to fuse together and could transmit information and co-opt people's consciousness on a mass scale. Their central characteristic is, as Knödler-Bunte notes, "its ability to adjust its offerings so that it satisfies general interests as well as the specific needs of individual groups." (Knödler-Bunte, 'The Proletarian Public Sphere and Political Organization,' 72.) Importantly, today, when speaking of new media people refer to social media and to the developments facilitated by the internet. We could say that these are but the latest development and somehow reaffirm the tendency toward the construction of a 'totally' mediatized system.

structuring of the workday) clash with the illusions and promises presented in the consciousness industry, something that only reinforces people's libidinal rejection of alienation and exploitation.

> Each ruling class manufactures sensually palpable products of a better life. It manufactures needs within the masses that it cannot satisfy. The palaces were assuredly not built for the masses, but these masses measure their needs by them . . . Modern capitalism necessarily produces, in answering to its own valorization interest, ideas and needs whose satisfaction on a mass scale could bring about its own destruction. (PSE, 44)

The attempt to "draw the centrifugal tendency of this societal wealth back into the context of primary exploitation" (PSE, 181), Negt and Kluge argue, is self-undermining. The consciousness industry, which develops as a way to eliminate the forces that threaten capitalist abstract, instrumentalizing logic, provides individuals with material that allows them to expand their subjectivity, and in so doing counters the capitalist tendency toward the 'total' abstraction of everything that resists valorization. It turns out that capitalism cannot sustain its tendency toward abstraction and growth without the consciousness industry, but it can neither do this with it. For Negt and Kluge, not even with the aid of the consciousness industry can capitalism seamlessly follow its path towards homogenization, abstraction, and reduction of difference.

Hence why when in the *Assault of the Present* Kluge realizes that people's wishes and fantasies will not fit within the project of capitalist development, he faces this with hope, not with resignation. The consciousness industry's failure to materially satisfy people's needs and fantasies, as Pavsek has argued, opens up a gap between "historically constituted [needs]" and the (in)capacity of capitalism to satisfy them. [340] In that gap, the protest energy of obstinacy survives. When in his film Kluge asks,

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[340] Pavsek, *The Utopia of Film*, 211.

'should this [expansion of the new media] imply that cinemas, radio, television, should be abolished?' the answer must be given in the negative. Rather, the task is to re-appropriate those media and the symbols and images they articulate, turning them into vehicles whereby people can confront and become aware of their own needs, fantasies, and interests. This is a task for both counter-public spheres and intellectuals (through their theoretical and artistic labour), something which I explore in upcoming chapters.

III.1 A 'New Spirit' of Capitalism?

It could be argued that the tension portrayed by Negt and Kluge between the 'work ethic' of capitalism and the ideals that emerge via the consciousness industry and mass culture no longer holds. Indeed, the evocation of sensual needs by the industry raised a challenge to the logic of capitalism, but capitalism was quick to absorb what Chiapello and Boltanski have called the 'artistic' criticism that emerged therein—by adapting itself, Boltanski and Chiapello argue, it managed to legitimize itself and in the way even raise tis productivity levels.[341] It is a characteristic of capitalism, after all, that everything that seems to oppose it can be voraciously integrated and made profitable. As it has been argued by Boltanski and Chiapello, who speak of a 'new spirit' of capitalism, the latter has managed to transform itself in relation to the demands and criticisms that arose from the sphere of culture—where people came face to face with their own unfulfilled sensual and unconscious needs.[342] Contrary to the way Negt and Kluge describe 'primary' exploitation (with its demands for delayed gratification, for

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[341] See Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, 'The New Spirit of Capitalism,' *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, Vol. 18, No. 3/4, (Spring - Summer, 2005): 175-176. See also Eve Chiapello, 'Evolution and co-optation: The "Artist Critique" of management and capitalism,' *Third Text*, 18, 2004).

[342] Boltanski and Chiapello, 'The New Spirit of Capitalism,' 176-179.

repression) capitalism now seems to call for 'flexibility,' 'originality,' and 'creativity,' something that would seem to allow for the sphere of production itself to meet people's needs for self-regulation. Employers are now called "creative entrepreneurs" or "self-employed persons," they are allowed to use their initiative, and to develop their skills autonomously. It could be argued, then, that the promises made by the consciousness industry can now be met by capitalisms' new (post-Fordist) spirit.[343]

One cannot but worry, therefore, that if capitalism is able to adapt to the needs and fantasies of individuals, then the tension between the values displayed by the mass media and the logic of capitalism might not be so undermining as Negt and Kluge thought. It could be argued, further, that capitalism—by transforming itself—has found a way to integrate the wishes and needs "that [threaten] to become independent of the immediate capital interest." (PSE, 181) As Honneth has argued, it would seem that those demands that emerged from the cultural sphere, *contra* e.g. Daniel Bell's thesis as expounded in his seminal work on the *Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism,*

> do not in any way conflict with the functional requirements of the capitalist economy; on the contrary, one cannot entirely avoid the impression that such tendencies have in the meantime become a productive force, albeit a peculiarly misused one, in capitalism's modernization.[344]

Negt and Kluge are aware that capitalism no longer follows what became known as Fordist or Taylorist forms of management, where efficiency is increased through mechanisms like division of labour and automatism. Technological and managerial changes demand of labourers skills which are no longer reduced to the mechanic, isolated repetition of menial tasks. (PSE, 155) However, Negt and

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343 Honneth, 'Organized Self-Realization,' 473.

344 Honneth, 'Organized Self-Realization,' 471. See Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, (New York: Basic Books, 1996).

Kluge are also aware that these attempts to respond to the needs and fantasies of subjects—insofar as these are produced and imposed heterogeneously—will not suffice to provide the "objective forms of satisfaction" necessary for self-regulation. For Negt and Kluge, the ideology of the consciousness industry does not succeed in absorbing the critical impulse of the fantasies it appropriates, since the latter "look for a context of meaning and thus respond primarily to products that provide not individual satisfactions, or individual use-values, but that offer whole cycles of them in the form of a context of living." (PSE, 157) A form of organization that is imposed *from without*, then, will not be able to eliminate people's obstinacy, i.e. their sense-of-self or self-will.

In this vein, it is relevant to note, with Honneth, that the institutional transformations undergone by capitalism de-substantiate people's needs and interests in the attempt to make them productive—just as the consciousness industry did and still does.[345] People's expectations, Honneth writes, "recoil on them as demands issuing from without." Ideals, he continues, are "being inverted into compulsions and expectations into demands."[346] Thus, it would not be surprising for Negt and Kluge that the alienation and the loss of meaning are still being experienced, even if this happens under new guises.[347] Neither would it surprise them that, under these conditions, people are still looking for refuge in the media. After all, as Honneth has argued, the moulding of people's needs, wishes, and fantasies through an imperative of the new forms of neo-liberal capitalism, transforms a self-posited ideal into what is experienced as an external compulsion. *And it is this logic which reproduces obstinacy*. The centrality of the media that now, more than ever, filters people's lives, is symptomatic of

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345 See Hansen, 'Foreword,' xxx.

346 Honneth, 'Organized Self-Realization,' 474.

347 To give but an example, the sociologist Alain Ehrenberg has studied depression as a pathology arising from a society geared toward individual success. Alain Ehrenberg, *The Weariness of Self: Diagnosing the History of Depression in the Contemporary Age*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010).

an ongoing pursuit for balance and self-regulation. The rise of protest movements and counter-publics such as, e.g., Extinction Rebellion, Black Lives Matter, or the feminist movement against the criminalization of abortion—which have many times used aesthetic and cultural devises to express their critique—evidences that the consciousness industry is not only failing to meet its legitimating role, but providing individuals with symbolic tools to transform their social suffering into political forms of protest.

I return to this point in Chapters IV and V below, but let me mention already one example here: the case of a political chant that emerged in Chile in 2019, only to then spread virally across the world, which is enlightening in this regard. Chile is a country that like many others in Latin America and across the globe suffers from systemic violence and oppression against women. According to statistics compiled by the *Chilean Network Against Violence Against Women*, to give some exemplar data, there were 58 femicides in 2018 and 38 in the first half of 2019.[348] It was in this context that the song 'Un violador en tu camino' ('A rapist in your path') by *Las Tesis*, a small Chilean collective, was appropriated by Chilean protesters in November of 2019, who organized a song-and-dance performance to criticize Chile's rape culture and the systemic violence against women. The song, one of the members from *Las Tesis* said, "was never intended to be a protest song – the women of the marches transformed it into something more."[349] But the story does not end there, because the videos of the performance quickly became viral themselves, thanks to the flow of information that social

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[348] Red Chilena contra la Violencia hacia las Mujeres, 'Dossier Informativo 2018 – 2019: Violencia Contra las Mujeres en Chile.' http://www.nomasviolenciacontramujeres.cl/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/DOSSIER-INFORMATIVO-2018.pdf. Accessed August, 2020.

[349] Charis McGowan, 'Chilean anti-rape anthem becomes international feminist phenomenon,' *The Guardian*, December 6, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/dec/06/chilean-anti-rape-anthem-becomes-international-feminist-phenomenon.

media allow for. Thus, Chile's performance was appropriated in France, Germany, Mexico, Argentina, Kenya, India, the United States, and counting, where groups of women copied (or rather appropriated) the Chilean initiative.

This example might be lauded as just another aesthetic performance which has no power to achieve any transformative changes—just another trendy video to post on social media, just another way to keep the protests against the criminalization of abortion focused in a level that cannot 'hurt' capitalism. But the fact that hundreds of thousands of women across the world found in that simple song a vehicle with which to express their anger, frustration, and their speechlessness, is not something that can be easily discarded as just another media stunt destined to fade off with time.

Just as the song by *Las Tesis*, the green and violet scarves worn by women to protest against anti-abortion laws and against a patriarchal society, respectively, are now a common sight, as are the scarlet cloaks that women started wearing, adopted from the novel-turned-TV series *The Handmaid's Tale*. It is noteworthy that this novel was produced for mass consumption and, in terms of its form, has nothing of the "rupture and fragmentation of symbolic discourse, which is defined as repressive and fundamentally phallocentric," characteristic of more 'radical' and 'subversive' literary experiments.[350] If there is any subversion in this novel it is in terms of its content, but what has really made it powerful has been its appropriation by generations of women who have found in it (and, not surprisingly, not so much in avant-garde feminist works like Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons* (1914) or

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[350] See Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 4-5. The fact that Margaret Atwood published a sequel to this novel just after the success of the TV version of her first novel speaks of the fact that her work would be much easier to catalogue as part of the 'culture industry.'

the work of Anaïs Nin)[351] a vessel that permits them to express their sense of alienation, and their rejection of a patriarchal society.

The initial (consumer-oriented) intentions of songs like that of *Las Tesis* or popular novels like Attwood's, or the fact that these symbols or cultural objects were not autonomously produced by an authentic collectivity of individuals, nor by avant-garde intellectuals, here take the back seat. What is important is the way these objects have been appropriated by an emerging collectivity of women, which have managed to—through them—gain an awareness of a shared experience that they had not been able to express, and thus develop a sense of solidarity through a shared experience. As a young student which is involved in these movements puts it, the appeal of these mass (aesthetic) protests lies in their "combination of a feeling of absolute anger and frustration, but also shared solidarity and joy. You're with other women, just saying: 'We're not going to put up with this.'"[352]

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Subjects have available today, perhaps more than ever, a range of cultural objects that allow them to express their feelings of injustice, oppression, alienation—feelings that run counter to the demands made by capitalist society (in its 'old' and 'new' guises). As I have argued, mass culture and the consciousness industry open up the possibility of a critique of capitalism—from its logic of accumulation to its appropriation of labour and human capacities. Mass produced objects, such as popular music or film, have made it possible for many subjects to re-signify their identities and their

[351] For some explorations on the feminist Avant-Garde, see, e.g., *Breaking the Sequence: Women's Experimental Fiction, Friedman*, Ellen G., and Miriam Fuchs (eds.), (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989). For a critique of because of their lack of political impact, see Felski's aforementioned *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*.

[352] Gaby Hinsliff, 'The rapist is you!': why a Chilean protest chant is being sung around the world,' *The Guardian*, February 3, 2020. https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/feb/03/the-rapist-is-you-chilean-protest-song-chanted-around-the-world-un-iolador-en-tu-camino.

ways of seeing the world (if not yet to construct them autonomously). Even if the consciousness industry still reproduces individuals as consumers, because it also articulates the subject's obstinate properties, their repressed fantasies and needs, *and does this in public*, it is better suited for the development of critique and an eventual collective praxis than autonomous works of art.

While Adorno was right in contending that culture is now produced 'from above,' what he failed to see was that not everyone consumes it uncritically and passively. Negt and Kluge's work on the culture industry, while not eclipsing the ideological role of this industry, allows us to expose a moment of resistance in popular and mass culture—one that Adorno could only locate in 'high' art. This moment, however, does not depend on the import that the works might or might not have. Instead, the works become significant through their social appropriation, something that is made possible because even the works produced for mass consumption reflect back to individuals their unfulfilled fantasies and wishes, their needs and interests.

To grasp the full extent of Negt and Kluge's critique and 'redemption' of the consciousness industry, thus, we need to turn away from the properties of the aesthetic objects themselves and focus instead on the geographical, social, and historical context in which these are produced and consumed. In order to further understand how (mass and popular) culture can trigger the formation of a critical and autonomous consciousness, then, in the upcoming chapter I turn to the work of Albrecht Wellmer, whose critique of Adorno's aesthetic theory brings to the fore the centrality of the moment of reception of aesthetic objects.

Chapter IV: Wellmer's Aesthetics of Reception and the Public Role of Popular Culture

According to Negt and Kluge, the consciousness industry—in spite of its ideological role—can express and articulate the obstinate traits that lie dormant within the subjects of capitalism in the form of fantasy, sensual feelings, wishes. In so doing, it provides people's repressed energies with public visibility, and makes available material that can allow individuals to reinterpret their needs. Therefore, it also counters capitalism's tendency toward abstraction. This is why, for Negt and Kluge, the consciousness industry, despite acting as an ideological mechanism, is also a site where different forms of public organization come into view. In Hansen's words, for Negt and Kluge 'industrial-commercial forms of publicity bring into view a substantially different function of the public sphere: that of a "horizon of experience," a discourse grounded in the context of everyday life, in material, psychic, and social (re)production.'[353]

Negt and Kluge's attempt to defend the positive value of 'mass' or 'popular' culture is shared by other members of the Frankfurt School such as Jürgen Habermas and Albrecht Wellmer, with whom they also share a scepticism about Adorno's defence of autonomous art and modernism. As we have seen, Adorno's aesthetic theory—in focusing merely on these 'hermetic' forms of art—narrows the understanding of what it means for art to be 'emancipatory,' and in consequence, political. Negt and Kluge contend, it that regard, that forms of 'high' art require a specialization of the senses that is out of reach for those socialized as labour power. (PSE, 267-268) As they put it, "the listening necessary for new music, [the] reading of great literature, [the] highly nuanced seeing of the plastic and visual arts" presupposes a "culturally produced one-sidedness" that excludes the majority of the

[353] Hansen, 'Foreword,' xxx.

population. (PSE, 267) This is why the products of the consciousness industry, which respond to the mode of perception of the masses, should become the target of a critical theory with an emancipatory intent, and why intellectuals should take aim at turning the mass media into a platform where a new form of experience can be organized, not just at criticizing it.[354]

Similarly, Habermas, questions Adorno's lack of engagement with publicly experientable art: "Adorno opposes the false abolition of art with the hermetic modernity of Kafka and Schoenberg, though specifically avoiding mass art, which makes auratically encapsulized experiences public," Habermas writes in a seminal essay on Walter Benjamin.[355] Adorno's turn to autonomous works of art—as a political move—Habermas argues, is a strategy of hibernation "whose obvious weakness lies in its defensive character."[356] Works of art that can be experienced collectively—e.g. architecture, theatre, popular literature, "electronic" music, film and television—however, Habermas contends, "point beyond mere culture industry."[357]

Given the association of his work with the formal conditions of communication and debate, it might come as a shock that Habermas (in some comments that have mostly flown below the radar)[358] also made the case for an understanding of art and, more generally, the aesthetic, as a source of a "semantic potential." Art, that is, could be a source of symbolic and discursive material that, if made

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354 I will explore the role of intellectuals in the appropriation of the public sphere and the consciousness industry in Chapter VI.

355 Jürgen Habermas, 'Consciousness-Raising or Redemptive Criticism: The Contemporaneity of Walter Benjamin,' *New German Critique*, No. 17, (Spring, 1979): 44.

356 Habermas, 'Consciousness-Raising or Redemptive Criticism,' 44.

357 Habermas, 44.

358 For some of the exceptions see, e.g., Jay, 'Habermas and Modernism,' David Ingram, 'Habermas on Aesthetics and Rationality: Completing the Project of Enlightenment,' *New German Critique*, No. 53 (Spring - Summer, 1991), or Pieter Duvenage, *Habermas and Aesthetics: The Limits of Communicative Reason*, (New York: Wiley, 2003).

public, could allow subjects to interpret society according to their own needs.[359] Habermas actually locates this potential in aesthetic *experience*—and more importantly, not in that of the expert or critic.[360] Rather, he speaks of the everyday reception of art, one not guided by any previous knowledge or by the expert. Habermas writes:

> Albrecht Wellmer has drawn my attention to one way that an aesthetic experience which is not framed around the experts' critical judgements of taste can have its significance altered: as soon as such an experience is used to illuminate a life-historical situation and is related to life problems, it enters into a language game which is no longer that of the aesthetic critic.[361]

When a non-expert claims a work of art to be valid, Habermas argues, this refers to the work's "singularly illuminating power [to] disclose anew an apparently familiar reality."[362] The moment of aesthetic experience, he continues, "renews the interpretation of our needs in whose light we perceive the world."[363]

Readers familiar with Habermas' work might find themselves puzzled by the aforementioned comments. Was not Habermas' theory focused on linguistic communication and on the formal elements of rational communication? Was not 'mimesis'—Adorno's placeholder for a full

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359 Jürgen Habermas, 'Questions and Counterquestions,' in *Habermas and Modernity*, 201-203, or 'Consciousness Raising,' 58-59. See also Jay, 'Habermas and Modernism,' 131.

360 As a contrast, see TCA, 20. There, Habermas associated the value of the aesthetic with its rationalization through "aesthetic criticism." In later works (see footnotes below) he returns to the position sketched in his essay on Benjamin, where the potential of the aesthetic is once again related to its 'everyday' experience.

361 Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity versus Postmodernity,' *New German Critique*, No. 22, (Winter, 1981): 12.

362 Habermas, 'Questions and Counterquestions,' 203.

363 Habermas, 'Modernity versus Postmodernity,' 12.

rationality—to be interpreted within a 'linguistic paradigm'?[364] While indeed, early in his career Habermas did focus on linguistic and formal communication, his encounter with the work of Albrecht Wellmer (whom he mentions above) allowed him to understand art and 'aesthetic reason' more generally under a different light. It was Wellmer, as Habermas recognizes in the quote above, who made him realize that the way individuals receive or experience works of art contains a potential which transcends the limits of both instrumental and communicative rationality, and which can help disclose the world, making the familiar appear unfamiliar.

Habermas, however, did not develop this aesthetic concern much further. It was Negt and Kluge who were left partly in charge of developing a theory of the culture industry and of aesthetic reception that went beyond the limits of Adorno. But Negt and Kluge's main focus was developing a theory of the public sphere and exploring the potential of what they call 'counter-production.' Kluge himself tried, in his literary and audio-visual interventions, to produce aesthetic objects that could trigger autonomous forms of thought, something I explore in the final chapter of this thesis. The potential contained within the products of the consciousness industry *itself* was not further examined by Negt and Kluge.[365] This left a path unexplored in their theory which could have allowed for a better

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[364] TCA, 390: "[T]he rational core of mimetic achievements can be laid open only if we give up the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness . . . in favor of the paradigm of linguistic philosophy . . . and puts (sic) the cognitive-instrumental aspect of reason in its proper place as part of a more encompassing communicative rationality."

[365] Kluge himself tried to tap into private television, but his strategy involved producing different types of products. Kluge, that is, used private television as a *medium* for his own counter-production, but he did not explore further the potential in the already existing entertainment products. Actually, during the 1980s Kluge became highly critical of the 'new media.' See Hansen, 'Reinventing de Nickelodeon,' 389-391, and Alexander Kluge, et. al., *Industrialisierung des Bewusstseins: Eine Kritische Auseinandersetzung mit den 'Neuen Medien'* (Munich/Zurich: Piper, 1985). Given his 'recent' interventions, it would seem that Kluge has recently turned his attention back to the mass media.

understanding of the role of (mass) culture vis-à-vis the formation and the political expression of social movements and counter-publics. In order to grasp the full implications of aesthetic experience and of cultural appropriation—as it regards popular culture and art—I now turn to the work of Albrecht Wellmer, before moving on to an assessment of Negt and Kluge's work on the 'public sphere,' which is the subject of Chapters V and VI.

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While Albrecht Wellmer's aesthetic work is relatively unknown within critical theory today (a fate he shares with Negt and Kluge) he has nevertheless developed a theory that can contribute largely to our understanding of the emancipatory role of art and culture. Wellmer's position is interesting since, while his theoretical grounds are clearly Habermasian (insofar as his focus is the social, moral, and cognitive roles of language and communication) Wellmer assigns a social and philosophical role to art that transcends the boundaries of communicative action. Furthermore, while he shares Adorno's belief in the emancipatory and cognitive power of art, he has focused on the moment of aesthetic experience and on the reception of art, rather than on the interpretation *of* and the truth *within* the artwork. *Contra* Adorno, who could locate art's potential only in forms of autonomous art, Wellmer unearths a potential in popular culture by focusing on experience and reception. This is something which can further the understanding of the (cognitive and political) roles of what Negt and Kluge call the 'consciousness industry.'

There are many clues that hint toward the proximity between Wellmer and Negt and Kluge in relation to the role of 'popular' or 'mass' art and the culture/consciousness industry. Kluge's idea of the 'film in the head of the spectator,' for example, highlights the centrality of the reception of the work of art—something that is as central to Wellmer's account. Similarly, the structural affinity between the 'fantasy value' of cultural objects and people's own fantasy—glossed out in *Public Sphere*

and Experience—anticipates Wellmer's critique of Adorno, which I develop throughout this chapter. For Wellmer, works of art contain not only an 'objective truth,' as Adorno argued, but rather a 'truth potential' which is actualized by the spectator. Wellmer speaks of a potential (rather than an objective) truth within the work because he believes that 'truth' inheres in the relation between work and receiver. It is the *process* of 'world disclosure' (that depends on the work's reception) that can be considered 'true,' and becomes the focus of Wellmer's work.[366] With this move, Wellmer bursts open the emancipatory power of art from the confines of modernism and autonomous art, which pours into the sphere of mass and popular culture.

Wellmer's work provides a link between my criticism of Adorno's aesthetics, developed in Chapter I, and Negt and Kluge's analysis of mass culture. What is more, Wellmer also provides the conceptual tools to further understand the role of culture and art vis-à-vis the constitution of counter-public spheres—social movements which are central to Negt and Kluge's analysis of the public sphere. In this sense, his work also broadens Negt and Kluge's argument about the way in which the consciousness industry gives public articulation to the needs and fantasies of a plurality of otherwise excluded constituencies. If Negt and Kluge show that the new media become sites where people confront their own needs and fantasies in public, Wellmer further exposes how cultural objects can be reappropriated, and how these help individuals constitute themselves following new and shared identities. Consequently, his work also shows that art and culture can pave the path toward the

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[366] The notion disclosure was coined by James Bohman. While I do not go into detail regarding Bohman's use of the concept, I am indebted to his account, especially to his argument regarding the value of the 'ordinary,' 'everyday' experience (as contrasted with the 'creative potency' of what he calls "innovators," i.e. poets and philosophers.) It is the former, he argues, that can allow us to solve the question: "how is it that we can experience new facts or embrace new values, if the world is experienced as already interpreted within a shared cultural framework ?" James Bohman, 'World Disclosure and Radical Criticism,' *Thesis Eleven* 37 (1994): 83.

construction of counter-publics. Wellmer's work provides a link toward the theory of counter-public spheres and of the public sphere, toward which I turn in the following chapters.

In what follows, I briefly reconstruct Wellmer's criticism of Adorno, which allows him to supplant the emphasis on reconciliation and art's 'truth content' with that of a truth potential that is generated in the relation between receiver and work of art (section I). I then develop Wellmer's alternative to Adorno's aesthetics by focusing on his arguments about the importance of reception and the communicative role of art (section II). Finally, I discuss the role popular art can play for political and social movements through the construction of new identities and the articulation of (repressed) interests and fantasies. To illustrate this, I present the example of the appropriation of David Bowie (both of his music and of himself *qua* cultural object) in the United Kingdom and the United States (section III).

I) Wellmer's criticism of Adorno's aesthetics

Wellmer's work on aesthetic reception can be understood as an attempt to synthesize the aesthetic concerns of Adorno with some of the moral and political concerns found in Habermas' theory of communicative action. Wellmer recognizes, in the first place, the critical aspect of Adorno's thought—directed toward the idea of a rationally organized society.[367] As I mentioned previously, however, for Adorno this can only mean a society without unnecessary suffering.[368] Adorno's notion of critique, thus, is linked to a materialism that refers to the recognition of the natural character of the spirit. For Adorno, the 'remembrance of nature in the subject [*das Eingedenken der Natur im Subjeckt*]' refers, as

[367] Wellmer, 'Sobre Negatividad y Autonomía del Arte,' 226. This and all forthcoming translations mine.

[368] Adorno quotes Benjamin in this regard: "While there is a beggar, there is a myth." (ND, 203)

Wellmer writes, to a recognition of the living aspect of nature—as opposed to a dead nature as objectified by scientific discourse and an objectifying (instrumental) reason. It also refers to the somatic and material aspect of subjectivity and of thinking itself.[369] Wellmer shares this concern with Adorno, and by extension, with Negt and Kluge who, to recall, in *History and Obstinacy* turn to the somatic and material aspects of the human being in search for that moment whereby a critical theory of society can hold onto.[370] The objectifying gaze of instrumental reason, for all of these thinkers, can blind us to the material processes behind our reality, and can lead to a repression of the possibility for happiness and sensual fulfilment. With Adorno, Wellmer thus acknowledges that critical thought must attempt to recover 'living nature,' 'mimesis,' or 'obstinacy,' as it is diversely called.

Adorno's thought circled around aesthetic concerns precisely because in art he found a site where that 'material' moment of thought and of subjectivity—threatened to become obscure given the hegemony of instrumental reason—could be safeguarded. This 'safeguarding' was required because the process of rationalization—which Adorno understood as a "negative dialectic of progress"—had, he believed, turned society into a closed-off totality, as discussed in Chapter I. "The whole is untrue," Adorno writes in *Minima Moralia*,[371] because according to his view, capitalist society had become so thoroughly organized by instrumental reason (objectifying living nature and repressing the subject's inner nature) that no practical alternative was presently conceivable. "The force of the whole," Adorno writes, "is not a mere fantasy on the part of spirit; it is the force of the real web of

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369 Wellmer, 'Sobre Negatividad y Autonomía del Arte,' 227. See also AT, 69: "Art is a refuge for mimetic comportment." See also, e.g., ND, 203.

370 "We hold fast to the view that the contradiction between living and dead labour encompasses the entire basic understanding of society" (HO, 130)

371 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 50.

illusion in which all individual existence remains trapped."[372] For Adorno, as Wellmer reads him, art's emancipatory potential lies in the possibility to transcend the limits of the concept and of communication—"geared to domination and self-preservation" (RUE, 48)—and in its capacity to adumbrate the possibility of an alternative, non-violent synthesis between particular and universal, between subject and object. Aesthetic reason, for Adorno, had epistemological and moral dimensions: through art (and philosophy), Adorno contended, we can transcend the semblance of a false reality, and orient our thinking against suffering and alienation.[373]

Wellmer shares Adorno's conviction regarding the way the sphere of art can transform the way we experience and sense reality,[374] as well as the conviction that art has a deeply critical and transformative effect. In order to link this back to a possible praxis, and to the everyday context of living, however, he has to reject Adorno's limitation of this power to forms of high, autonomous art. According to Wellmer, that Adorno limited this power in such a way was a consequence of his diagnosis of modern societies: the logic of reality was so irremediably corrupt that the aesthetic—if it was to preserve the moment of critique—had to be sealed within a hermetically sealed sphere, insulated from the repressive logic of an all-pervasive rationality. For Wellmer, however, these dire

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[372] Theodor Adorno, 'Aspects of Hegel's Philosophy,' in *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 87.

[373] See, e.g., Espen Hammer, *Adorno's Modernism. Art, Experience, and Catastrophe*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 28-30; or Raymond Geuss, 'Suffering and Knowledge in Adorno,' in *Outside Ethics*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 115-116: "Adorno's philosophy can be seen as a philosophy of suffering spirit, a way of articulating the pain spirit experiences when confronted with a world that thwarts its aspirations, and as such, a criticism of that world."

[374] See, e.g., Maria Pia Lara, 'Albrecht Wellmer: between spheres of validity,' *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, vol. 21, 2 (1995): 3: "Both authors are united by a common conviction: that the aesthetic dimension presupposes a deep transformation as to how we construct ways of feeling and living, based on the complexity that only art can explore without fear of simplifying it or making it banal."

and ‘radical’ conclusions (which as we will see inevitably lead to perceiving reality with a pessimistic and melancholic gaze) could be avoided. Doing so, however, would require, on the one hand, questioning Adorno’s construal of modern societies—structured through the relation between subjectivation and reification—and on the other, problematizing what Wellmer sees as a badly utopian (because separated from its possible historical realization) concept of aesthetic truth, premised on a too burdensome notion of reconciliation between nature, humanity, and reason. (TSR, 7)

According to Wellmer, given these two—a too pessimistic account of social negativity and a too emphatic notion of reconciliation contained in art—the relation between art and reality cannot but appear as antithetical: the promise of happiness contained in aesthetic truth thus becomes the negation of the existing unreconciled reality. (TSR, 8) For Wellmer, we will see, the problem with this relation is that it pushes art’s promise of reconciliation out of reach of human history and praxis: Because of the antithetical relation, Adorno has to link the idea of a true and critical art with the import of artworks—making its truth self-referential and thus a matter of for the ‘expert’ interpreter.

Wellmer begins by questioning the way Adorno reduces social rationality to instrumental rationality, something that, Wellmer argues, only makes it possible to conceive of emancipation as a “sublation of instrumental into aesthetic rationality.” (RUE, 49) But because of the other-worldly character of aesthetic rationality, this sublation can only appear as a ‘messianic break’ which opens up what Adorno calls a “chasm separating praxis from happiness.” (AT, 15) In view of this, Wellmer can rightly assert that, from Adorno’s perspective, a radical social change can “no longer constitute a meaningful goal of human praxis.” (TSR, 12)

In order to push Adorno’s work out of this dead end, Wellmer appeals to Habermas, with whom he argues that Adorno’s philosophy is lead to this dead-end since it is modelled only on a one-directional subject-object relation. That Adorno ties the process of subjectification to reification,

obscures the necessary role of intersubjective relations for the development of modern societies, Wellmer argues. (TSR, 13) Those relations, nevertheless, cannot function merely instrumentally, but require a cooperative, communicative dimension. Suffice it to mention that, for Wellmer, it is Adorno's failure to consider the latter non-instrumental relations which leads him to mis construe the status and location of those mimetic "forms of behaviour which are sensually receptive, expressive and communicative."

Adorno locates those mimetic forms in art, since—according to him—art preserves them and, thus, keeps alive the possibility of a social transformation. But the problem for Wellmer is that Adorno locates them *only* in art (*qua* isolated object of study), and crucially, only in high, autonomous art. This is because within Adorno's framework, the mimetic can only survive as a moment *outside* conceptual, communicative thought, and thus outside a society structured following those instrumental principles. (TSR, 4)[375] 'Genuine' or 'authentic' art (i.e. art that safeguards mimesis and thus preserves a moment of critique) must be conceived by Adorno as something *outside* existing society, as I argued briefly in Chapter I, and as art that rejects all socially available forms of communication. Hence why aesthetic truth is located by Adorno, first, in autonomous art, but further, not on their reception nor their content, but on their import—i.e. on its formal organization and structure.

The above complicates matters further because, according to Adorno, the work's import itself must be antinomical if the work is to remain true. The reason for this antinomical structure within the work of art (and not only between the work and society), according to Wellmer's analysis, is dependent

[375] There is good evidence to support this claim. We could think, e.g., of the way Adorno speaks of the way art can "testify to the unreconciled and at the same time envision its reconciliation." According to him "this is a possibility only for [art's] nondiscursive language." (AT, 221)

on Adorno's conception of the relation between truth, semblance, and reconciliation within artworks. But how does Adorno conceive of this relation?

To understand this, we need to consider two elements that, for Adorno, constitute art's truth: first, the need for art to represent reality accurately, i.e. on its representational truth—which in this case means exposing it as a negative and false reality—and second, the rightness or validity of the work, i.e. the coherence of its structuring, or what I have called its import.[376] These two elements come together in the following sense: artworks are 'valid' when they are constructed following a non-violent synthesis of its elements, a non-dominating relation between mimesis and technique. It is through this particular type of synthesis that art exposes reality as unreconciled, as violent—which is for Adorno the only way to represent our current (unreconciled) reality truthfully. As Wellmer puts it:

> Art can thus only be true in the sense of being faithful to reality to the extent that it shows reality as unreconciled, antagonistic, divided against itself. But it can only do this ... by the non-violent aesthetic synthesis of disparate elements which produces the semblance of reconciliation. (TSR, 9)

The way artworks 'show' reality in the light of reconciliation, that is, is *not* dependent on whether a state of utopia is represented, but rather on the way the material is formed technically.

The picture is further complicated by the fact that, if this synthesis is successful, then this implies that the work has produced the semblance of meaning. This is problematic because, given that art *is* ultimately part of reality—however autonomous it might be—then its presence as a (seemingly) meaningful object would negate what it would like to show, namely, that reality is void of meaning. Differently put, what art's existence seems to show is that what does not exist (i.e. meaning) actually

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[376] See Chapter I, section II above.

does exist. If art is meaningful—as its semblance says it is—and if art is (however tangentially) part of reality, then reality *must have* (at least) something meaningful in it. But this is precisely what art would want to deny. Aesthetic semblance, therefore, threatens to come into conflict with its own critical and emancipatory intentions. As Adorno writes, "[b]y their very existence artworks postulate the existence of what does not exist and thereby come into conflict with the latter's actual nonexistence." (AT, 76)

It turns out that to be aesthetically valid, art must not only turn against reality, but against its own principle, therefore negating not only every previous forms of aesthetic synthesis, but, almost self-consciously, negating its own achievement *qua* work of art as well. Artworks, according to Adorno, must on the same pass negate meaning and become meaningful, or rather, it is through the negation of meaning that they acquire meaning—something that pushes 'genuine' art into a vortex of experimentation, abstraction, formalism; making every new successful work of art more intricate, more complex and self-referential than the previous one. Wellmer captures this movement when he contends that, from Adorno's perspective,

> art can only survive and remain authentic if it succeeds in articulating the negation of synthesis as its aesthetic meaning, and in bringing about aesthetic synthesis in the very process of negating it. The modern work of art must, in a single pass, both produce and negate aesthetic meaning; it must articulate meaning as the negation of meaning, balancing, so to speak, on the razor's edge between affirmative semblance and an anti-art that is bereft of semblance." (TSR, 10)

Clearly, this balancing act cannot be conceived within the medium of conceptual, discursive thought. And while this is exactly Adorno's point (this is what makes art the perfect safeguard for mimesis), what he does not recognize (or perhaps could not, given his construal of capitalist societies) is that this presents a problem for the *political* viability of autonomous art. This is because, given that

the truth of art can only be presented in such an aporetic way—and thus in a way that is ineffable—then the subject that experiences art, Wellmer writes, "cannot truly know what it is experiencing. The truth that displays itself in that momentary flash of aesthetic experience is concrete and immediate; as we try to grasp it, it fades away." (TSR, 6)

Aesthetic experience, so Adorno thinks, must be incommensurable with the hermeneutical or conceptual tools available within a *reified* reality. For Adorno, therefore, art's truth (contained in its import, in its formal aspects)—if it is to be a truth at all—must be hermetic, obscure, incomprehensible from the standpoint of a consciousness determined through the logic of *this* reality. Hence why Adorno has to appeal to a form of subjectivity—whose existence he can only explain through contingent factors like luck—that is also unavailable. The 'balancing act' of which Wellmer talks about, that is, implies that art's meaning cannot be comprehended through the forms of subjectivity that belong to this (false) world—not, at the very least, in any substantial sense.

In order to transcend this problem, as we have seen, Adorno appeals to philosophical interpretation, something that requires certain interpretive capacities that themselves already transcend the limits of the concept and of instrumental reason, i.e. some capacities that for all practical purposes are *also* (just like art's promise) other-worldly. In line with the criticism expounded in Chapter I, Wellmer can contend that art's truth becomes, ultimately, addressed only to subjects that are already 'beyond' the grasp of social reality—not to the subjects that have it in their interest to trigger a substantial socially transformative praxis. Hence why, for Wellmer, in Adorno's aesthetic theory art's truth becomes separated from anything that human praxis could reach.

In privileging the structural, formal aspects of artworks (over other dimensions such as its reception), Adorno's aesthetic theory ends up "[denigrating] art's truth potential in ordinary aesthetic

experience," as Zuidervaart puts it.[377] Similarly, for Wellmer, insofar as Adorno can locate this possibility of reconciliation only in the interpretation of art, the possibility of a social transformation can no longer be thought of as a historical project, since this possibility would lie beyond the scope of any social group that could transform that truth into a source for action. As Wellmer writes: "the task of bridging [reality with reconciliation] can no longer constitute a meaningful goal of human praxis." (TSR, 12) Wellmer reinforces the point by quoting Adorno, according to whom

> [a]rt's *promesse du bonheur* means not only that hitherto praxis has blocked happiness but that happiness is beyond praxis. The measure of the chasm separating praxis from happiness is taken by the force of negativity in the artwork. (AT, 14-15)

II) <u>Wellmer's Alternative: An Aesthetics of Reception</u>

According to Wellmer's analysis, the central issue with Adorno's aesthetics is the way art is taken to be in an "a priori in a polemical relationship to reality." (TSR, 15-16) In this section, I want to reconstruct Wellmer's attempt to move beyond this conundrum, something he does, first, by questioning Adorno's totalizing account of instrumental rationality, and second, by focusing on the reception of the works of art. By doing so, Wellmer's aim is showing that the relation between art and reality can be understood differently, while retaining art's critical aspect. The latter, however, becomes related less to safeguarding the emphatic possibility of happiness (as in Adorno's account) and, instead, the possibility to affect people's way of interacting and perceiving reality takes centre-stage.

In order to connect back the aesthetic with everyday praxis, Wellmer changes the terms of what is at stake: for him, it is not a question of reaching a state of reconciliation, but of reaching a

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[377] Zuidervaart, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory*, 286.

state of "unimpaired intersubjectivity," which he deems "a condition which permits a multiplicity of subjects to come together without coercion." (TSR, 14) Whether this bet proves to be worth the risk will depend on whether Wellmer can justify the effectivity of (non-autonomous) art's 'world disclosing' function, and on whether we consider that such a state of unimpaired intersubjectivity can lead to a radical transformation of the oppressive social structures. I discuss these questions at the end of this section.

Before digging into the details, let me give a brief overview of Wellmer's argument. To make his account plausible, Wellmer begins by rejecting Adorno's construal of modernity as the result of a dialectic of 'negative' progress, where reification and subjectification are dialectically entwined. Wellmer does this by appealing to Habermas' account of communicative rationality—which is socially present alongside instrumental rationality, and where mimetic forms of interaction are preserved. Because Adorno cannot conceive of this moment within everyday reason, Wellmer argues, he is lead to postulate a subjectivity that works, by virtue of its own logic, toward its extermination. (TSR, 15)[378] The presence of mimetic forms of interaction within everyday reason, however, dissolves the entwinement between reification and subjectivation, Wellmer claims. What is more, this also allows him to conceive of art as something that can preserve its emancipatory power without having to detach itself from society.

This, I argue, allows us to see other forms of art (especially popular and mass culture) under a different perspective. Those works can, just as high art, actualize something within the subject, and

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[378] Wellmer refers to a passage from *Aesthetic Theory* where Adorno speaks of 'construction' (the logical and causal element within works of art) as "the synthesis of the diverse at the expense of the qualitative elements that it masters, and at the expense of the subject, which intends to extinguish itself as it carries out this synthesis." (AT, 74) As discussed in Chapter I, this logic is what fuels the constitution of a necessarily reified subject—historically as well as aesthetically.

thus have an emancipatory potential. In short, Wellmer's understanding of 'aesthetic reason' allows us to see that art's political role—understood, with Adorno, not as the direct intervention in praxis, but as the constitution of autonomous subjects—*can* be realized (something that Adorno failed to do), and that it can be done through forms of 'mass' culture.

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According to Wellmer, Adorno's aesthetic theory is caught in a dead end: in order to preserve mimesis for the sake of a future reconciliation, Adorno locates it outside the realm of what appears practically possible. In doing so, however, the possibility to ever reach such a state of reconciliation becomes abstract—detached from history, as it were. Wellmer's intention is to find a way in which mimesis can move back to the realm of history, giving it a role in everyday human praxis. As Zuidervaart has contended, the aim of Wellmer's criticism, then, is to move beyond three fundamental constrains of Adorno's aesthetic theory, and which foreground the aforementioned problem. These are the tension set between instrumental and aesthetic reason; the 'overburdening' of art as a model of reconciliation; and the "esotericism" of the notion of aesthetic truth.[379] Let me dwell briefly on these, in order to provide a clearer picture of Wellmer's own standpoint—which, as already anticipated, is highly indebted to Habermas' paradigm shift to intersubjectivity and communication.

The central piece of Wellmer's critique is the contention that mimesis need not be conceived as the *other* of conceptual reason, and, hence, as something outside the realm of our current social reality. Because Adorno conceives of mimesis and (instrumental) reason in such starkly opposed terms, then (i) the utopia 'prefigured' in art—namely, an emphatic possibility of reconciliation between man and nature—becomes so detached from actuality that its realization becomes inconceivable.[380]

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379 Zuidervaart, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory*, 227.

380 For Wellmer, in Adorno's work the possibility of redemption preserved in art "is not only not of this world; it

According to Wellmer, however, there is a mimetic moment within the conceptual and communicative uses of reason. This allows him to claim that mimetic elements can be found just as much in everyday interactions and communication, as in philosophy or art. This also implies that the 'aesthetic' and the 'instrumental' are not opposed moments of rationality, but rather signify *complementary* orientations and discourses, different ways—both as rational—of creating and relating to reality, and to one another.[381] Once this mimetic moment is located in everyday interactions—and not *only* within certain types of esoteric, or 'other-worldly' aesthetic (or philosophical) objects—however, the possibility of reconciliation stops appearing as something out of reach from human praxis. For Wellmer, that is, art (and thinking) can have a moment of truth, even when they communicate or interact with this reality—which is reified, indeed, but not completely.

Wellmer proposes to replace Adorno's model of reason with a more differentiated one—a model that conceives of reason as pertaining to both the objectivation of reality through its control and domination, as well as to the non-violent relation that Adorno saw modelled in aesthetic synthesis. For Wellmer, that non-violent synthesis is also found in, e.g., intersubjective relations, or in the relation between subjects and objects from mass or popular art, as we will see below. What Wellmer (again with Habermas) claims, is that modern societies cannot be integrated simply through the logic of instrumental reason. What Adorno failed to see was the complementary integration through mechanisms of action coordination between subjects that, he argues, are also necessary for societies' institutional and symbolic reproduction. In short, for Wellmer the historical process of subjectification cannot be reduced to the advance in instrumental rationality, but also involves a moment of

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issues, in Schopenhauerian terms, from a world that lies beyond space, time, causality and individuation." (TSR, 11)

[381] See RUE, 49, and TSR, 15: "'[C]ommunicative rationalization' on the one hand, and 'system rationalization' and scientific or technical progress on the other stand in a 'complementary' relationship in the modern world."

intersubjectivity and communication. With this, he brings back to the historical plane a degree of freedom that was lost to Adorno, in a move which has consequences (which I expound below) for art and aesthetics.[382]

It has been objected that Wellmer, in adopting Habermas' framework, concedes too much to modern capitalist societies, or that he misconstrues Adorno's understanding of reason and the separation between the 'aesthetic' and the 'rational.' This debate transcends the scope of this work, but I would like to at least open up the possibility that—insofar as Wellmer's argument depends on the minimal condition that there are 'mimetic' elements within everyday reality—we need not buy wholesale into Habermas' model of communicative reason for Wellmer's critique to hold. Arguably, it would suffice to understand the logic of modernization (the process of accumulation, in this case) as allowing for a degree of heterodoxy *within* the subject—be it in the structures that allow communication, or alternatively, as Negt and Kluge do, within the capacitates and material constitution of the subject.[383]

Wellmer could also be criticized for his (at moments) uncharitable interpretation of Adorno—the latter who, it could be argued, did not see aesthetic reason as a model of social integration. In spite of this, what is correct about Wellmer's argument is the contention that, once we locate mimetic elements within everyday society, then the possibility of reconciliation can be localized outside

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[382] See TSR, 15: "[T]he transition from the 'negation of objectively binding meaning' to the 'meaninglessness' of late capitalist reality can no longer be derived dialectically from the impossibility of 'meaning posited by the subject.'"

[383] Habermas and Wellmer appeal to the intrinsic structures of language and communication, whereas Negt and Kluge to labour capacities. As we will see below, however, Wellmer goes beyond (the early) Habermas since his account of the aesthetic can accommodate for a moment that transcends the boundaries and limits of communicative action (and its distinction between cognitive, practical, and expressive validity.) In doing so, Wellmer preserves an emancipatory moment in art—a moment that can also be deployed to criticize the institutions of modernity, and not only the (incomplete) realization of their normative content.

hermetic forms of art or thought. Furthermore, the opposition between instrumental and aesthetic/mimetic reason might be more complexly articulated in Adorno's work than it might appear in Wellmer's Habermasian-inspired critique. (For example, it could be rightly argued that for Adorno, aesthetic import requires technique, which is closer to the instrumental than to the mimetic.) What is important to salvage from the critique, however, is, first, that Wellmer's understanding of the 'emancipatory power of the aesthetic' as something that transcends the limits of language and the differentiation of spheres of value, and hence opposes the socially dominating forms of reason. In this sense, Wellmer retains the core of Adorno's critique of instrumental and conceptual reason.[384] *Contra* Adorno, second, art's truth can be understood as more than the hermetic promise of reconciliation—namely, as the possibility to actualize or generate capacities in the (often alienated) receiver that allow it to experience the world differently.

II.1 Art, Subjectivity and Reception

Adorno conceived of modern societies as the result of a process of rationalization that ended up with the virtual extinction of the subject. But for Wellmer, while the process of modernization "[unleashes] possibilities of reification," it has also extended the limits of the subject. (TSR, 20) And this is something that, Wellmer contends, was actually presupposed by Adorno's notion of aesthetic progress, even if Adorno failed to account for it. This is apparent, Wellmer argues, when Adorno describes the process of development within the aesthetic sphere as one where, as society becomes more tightly knit by instrumental reason, art responds by itself developing forms and strategies to progressively "[incorporate] those aspects of reality that are senseless, alien to the subject, and not

[384] In fact, Habermas also recognizes this, as mentioned above, so we must also be careful not to misconstrue his critique.

integrated into his universe of meaning." (TSR, 19) This development leads art toward becoming increasingly self-referential, complex, flexible, or open, as Adorno recognized. For Wellmer, however, this process cannot but be accompanied by the progressive development of the (creative and receiving) subject, whose capacities must also progressively develop, since it is this subject which, in the end, creates or decodes these works, in all of their complexity and hermetism. As Wellmer contends, Adorno's account of the development of modernism, therefore, presupposes a parallel strengthening of the subject:

> Adorno himself set the open forms of modern art in relation to a form of subjectivity which no longer corresponds to the rigid unity of the bourgeois subject, but which displays the more flexible organizational form of a 'communicatively fluid' ego-identity. (TSR, 20)

For Wellmer, this was something Adorno could not recognize, since "he did not concede to modern society what he had conceded to modern art, namely that enlightenment has liberated possibilities of 'extending the limits of the subject.'" (TSR, 20) Arguably, this failure to recognize more possibilities for the development of subjectivity within modern societies is what made Adorno appeal to contingent notions such as luck to account for the persistence of a subject able to 'interpret' art's truth. However, if it is recognized that modern societies not only reduce subjective autonomy as they become instrumentalized (be it because there is a mimetic moment within language, or because instrumentalization requires separations which also allow the subject to gain more capacities, as Negt and Kluge theorize) it becomes possible to speak of art in functional terms, without thereby 'corrupting' its emancipatory power. Art can then be analysed, e.g., as something that enables the receiving subject's own development—and this, we will see, also applies to non-autonomous art.

Wellmer's disclosure and construal of a *functional* dimension of art which connects it to society (through the expansion of subjective capacities) is crucial, since it shifts the focus of 'aesthetic truth'

away from its formal and representative characteristics. It turns out that, *contra* Adorno, art's social function is not only its functionlessness. (AT, 297) Art can also have a direct impact on the receiving subject—one not mediated by its import and interpretation—which can thus become (in however weak form) a source of meaning.[385] This also means that, even if capitalism—as an objective form of social organization—structurally negates meaning, it is not completely meaningless.

Art can be meaningful or significant, Wellmer's argument shows, without having to perform a complete detachment from reality (thereby making it esoteric). What is more, that its meaning is read as something that must necessarily *pass through* the subject (affecting its capacities, its behaviour) re-connects it to living praxis. That Adorno could not see this was related to the fact that, for him, art's truth could only be preserved outside the 'untrue' whole, and so was the subject of that could attain this truth.[386] But by seeing art vis-à-vis a receiving subject, it can now be understood "as something which *actively affects* reality" by affecting the subject. (TSR, 16) From this perspective, whether or not art is emancipatory now depends on whether, in expanding the boundaries of the *receiving* subject, the work allows it to perceive and experience the world differently, more fully. (TSR, 16)

Wellmer appeals to the work of Gabrielle Schwab to justify the existence of a functional connection between the open forms of modern art (she mentions the works of authors like Virginia Wolf and Thomas Pynchon) and the "expanded boundaries" of the modern subject. According to Schwab, those works show how

> the reflexive opening-up of literary forms of representation triggers a playful to and fro

[385] Note, again, that this is a perspective that (even if grounded in differing premises) is shared by Negt and Kluge, insofar as they conceive of capitalism as a process that constantly creates new capacities, even if these are not allowed to unfold.

[386] See, e.g., AT, 9: "Art is the social antithesis of society, not directly deducible from it."

> between identification and differentiation on the part of the reader, which effectively works towards a genuine expansion of subjective boundaries. (TSR, 20)

Note that this interaction between work and subject can only happen, in the first place, when the receiver is able to find herself reflected (with her problems, anxieties, fantasies) within the work, or when the work directly affects her ways of perceiving reality. Only because the work can make a connection with the subject is it able to trigger a recovery of repressed layers of experience that otherwise remained "remote from the subject and [from] 'meaning.'" (TSR, 21) With this, Wellmer's work shows—as Adorno's late work hinted—that art can be 'effective' via the mere aesthetic experience, i.e. via its reception, and, consequently, does not require the mediation by the art critic or the philosophical interpretation.

<u>II.2 The (Popular) Reception of Art</u>

While Wellmer tends to focus on modern art—especially when he speaks of their open forms—art's potential to expand the boundaries of the subject can be extended to other forms of art, and what is more, is not dependent on their formal composition. In the previous chapter, for example, I have already contended, by drawing on Negt and Kluge, that even the cultural objects of the consciousness industry can push the subject beyond its limited forms of experience via their 'fantasy' value, as Negt and Kluge call it. (PSE, 172) Even the culture industry can challenge its spectator, triggering a dynamic movement of identification and separation, just as 'high' art does to its own subject, and this is not done through the modernist 'openness' and complexity of form. In this sense, even the culture industry provides individuals with opportunities for self-interpretation. Actually, as Negt and Kluge argue, given their mass distribution, it might be that the products of the culture industry have a more

subversive role than radical modernism. In this vein, Rita Felski has argued that cultural objects such as realist novels—that might appear ideologically suspect from the perspective of modernism—

> ... may allow for a *greater* richness and diversity of interpretation than modern experimental texts, which are interpreted with monotonous regularity as metalinguistic propositions about the impossibility of representation.[387]

The way many subgroups have defined their identities through the appropriation of popular culture, or the way a feminist consciousness was formed through the reception of feminist popular literature, exposes that the relation theorized by Wellmer concerning the reception of 'modern art' is also part and parcel of the reception and (re)appropriation of realist literature, popular music, or mass culture in general.[388] As empirical examples evidence, even popular culture allows the public to identify with and differentiate themselves from the symbols, stereotypes, and images provided; and usually (although not always) this has nothing to do with the formal aspect of these works. This implies that the emancipatory power of the aesthetic—as theorized by Wellmer—need not be limited to modern art. This allows to turn the focus toward types of art that are *directly* accessible to (and comprehensible for) the public, because these too can trigger memories, activate our fantasies and capacities, and thereby expand our subjectivity. Aesthetic experience is disclosed, in this case, as a moment that provides the subject with the symbolic or conceptual tools needed to gain a better understanding of herself and her reality.

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[387] Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*, 157.

[388] See, for example, Diederichsen, 'The Adequacy of Signs,' for an account of Jazz and pop music, or Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics* (esp. Chapters 3, 4 and 5) for an account of the relation between feminism and literature. See also e.g. Angela McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture. From Jackie to Just Seventeen*, (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1991), or 'Recent rhythms of sex and race in popular music,' *Media, Culture & Society*, vol. 17, (1995).

Importantly, in conceptualizing the aesthetic 'truth potential' as emerging from the relation between artwork and receiver, Wellmer also broadens the meaning of 'communicative action,' which can now accommodate forms of non-discursive communication. Once we consider the way individuals experience works of art as part of their daily lives, we can see that their truth cannot be reduced to either cognitive, moral-practical, or expressive-affective rationality. The experience of the work of art not only expands the ways of perceiving such a reality; it also influences moral, political, and practical precepts. This means that, as Wellmer argues, aesthetic validity (i.e. the 'rightness' of a work of art) must function in relation to questions of truth, of moral and practical reason, and of truthfulness or sincerity; and thus also relates to politics, history, and the possibility of transforming both the self and the social conditions. And crucially, it is not reducible to any one of these. (TSR, 22) This is why, for Wellmer, the validity of a work of art (upon which the emancipatory power of the aesthetic is predicated) must not be considered an objective fact within the aesthetic object, but a "phenomenon of interference" that emerges from the relation between the work and the receiver and that affects different levels of perception and understanding. (TSR, 23) "Truth," as Zuidervaart similarly argues, stops being "the ultimate criterion for the social significance of art."[389]

To grasp the meaning of the independence between function and form, and of this broader understanding of 'aesthetic communication,' we could think, e.g., of how many works of art are able to influence our moral precepts, our ways of acting, the way we think about truth in a more substantial sense, and yet do this without raising any moral, practical, or instrumental claims—at least not directly or discursively.[390] Any piece of instrumental music, any non-representational painting, could be cited

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[389] Zuidervaart, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory*, 232.

[390] See for example Theodor Adorno, 'Art and the Arts,' in *Can One Live After Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader,* trans. Rodney Livingstone, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 382, where Adorno refers to music's concept-like qualities. In 'Music and Language: A Fragment,' similarly, Adorno writes: "Music points to true language in the sense

as evidence of this: its experience seems to tell us something, but this 'something' would never be fully captured if we tried to put it into words. It is difficult to give examples here precisely because what might work for me (say, the murals of Diego Rivera) might not trigger a reaction in someone else; or because the 'effect' of a work on its public might wear off with time. Notably, it is also the case that many works that have no autonomy or truth content in Adorno's sense can affect the receiver toward broader forms of understanding, and as such be bearers of a truth potential. Art's social function or significance, thus, is not dependent on the criteria of autonomy nor on that of 'aesthetic validity' in Adorno's sense.[391] Many feminist novels, for example, have helped develop the consciousness of women, inviting a psychological transformation, but those novels do not fit with the criteria of truth or autonomy as postulated by Adorno.[392]

Whatever the social significance a work of art has, and whatever the meaning it transmits, will depend as much on the context and the life-history under which it is received than on its formal constitution. On the one hand, then, what the work of art 'says' transcends the limits of discursive

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that content is apparent in it, but it does so at the cost of unambiguous meaning, which has migrated into the languages of intentionality." Theodor Adorno, "Music and Language: A Fragment,' in *Quasi una Fantasia. Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, (London: Verso, 2011), 3. Adorno mentions, e.g., the opening of the recapitulation in the first movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony as an instance that is so eloquent that stands on the verge of becoming language (and yet cannot ultimately do so), or of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* as an example where the voice of the voiceless subject is objectified—not through concepts, but through musical expression.

391 See for example Lambert Zuidervaart, 'The Social Significance of Autonomous Art: Adorno and Bürger,' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (Winter, 1990): 71.

392 I refer the reader again to Felski's work on the feminist public sphere and feminist novels. As Felski argues, novels like Lessing's *The Summer before the Dark*, or Piercy's *Fly away Home* develop in a sort of *Bildungsroman* style, and are intended to trigger a "shift in perspective" where a sense of estrangement and alienation are transformed, e.g., "through a steady accumulation of insights into the structures of power governing relationships between men and women." (Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*, 131.)

language. As Adorno would rightly put it, artworks communicate through non-communication.[393] But on the other, and this is something Adorno overlooked, because every receiver will potentially apprehend something different yet significant, one should understand 'truth' and 'significance' as two different and independent elements of the work. Art's truth (in terms of the meaning it can convey) can differ depending on the epoch, social context, and individual situation of the receiver, and cannot be conceptually stabilized. Ultimately, thus, for Wellmer what is important is not only the truth that is contained in art, but the possibility for art to disclose a truth: *the way the work can lead to truth by affecting the subject.* (TSR, 24-25) By locating 'truth' in the seam between work and audience, it is freed from its confinement within a hermetic modernism.

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Wellmer's work—further justifying Negt and Kluge's 'defence' of the consciousness industry—shows that regardless of their formal aspect, artworks can have a truth potential, which is actualized in their reception. This potential, what is more, can be present even in works that do not isolate themselves from society, since it is a potential that can change with the historical, political, or social context that surrounds the work and its appropriation. Wellmer's critique of Adorno shows that there is no need to remain within the limits of 'high' modernist art, nor to make the emancipatory power of the aesthetic something detached from its reception, and ultimately from political praxis. If what matters is the way art can be received and how it can affect its audience, then the concerns with 'form' and 'coherence' move to a second plane.

To give an example: whether the intertwining of solo and theme in John Coltrane's 'My Favorite Things' expresses a formal dialectic between a gesture of rebellion and a tendency to obey, is

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393 See e.g. AT, 319: "[B]y its affirmation the music at the same time speaks the truth about untruth. Non-judging, artworks point—as with their finger—to their content without its thereby becoming discursive."

not as relevant as it might seem. Rather, the critic should focus on the impact that music has on musicians and listeners, and on the way music changes our active relation to our world.[394] What was the context where jazz music (including that piece) was played? How did the listeners appropriate it? How did it reflect the struggles of the composer, of its audience? What sort of relations between these did the music trigger? Where Wellmer focuses on these issues, his analyses become most relevant, and direct us toward a critical study of popular music, and of its relation to the construction of social movements and public spheres.

Wellmer's reception aesthetics, therefore, also problematize the extent to which the culture industry can erase from the cultural map everything that is local, oppositional, non-identical. There is more heterogeneity within mass production than Adorno conceded, and it does not matter if that heterogeneity is superficial, since it still allows individuals and social groups to problematize the established patterns of socialization. For, as Wellmer shows, in line with Negt and Kluge, the reifying tendencies of capitalism and the culture industry produce reification, as Adorno well noted; but these also produce, and *depend upon*, as he writes, "contrary forces in which these same tendencies are also broken."[395]

III) <u>Popular Culture and Counter-Publics: The Construction of Identity through Cultural Appropriation</u>

According to Adorno, the culture industry has to be distinguished from mass and popular culture in the strongest sense, in order to make it clear that it is not a form of culture that "arises spontaneously

[394] See Diederichsen, 'The Adequacy of Signs,' 40, and Wellmer, 'Sobre Negatividad y Autonomía del Arte,' 259.

[395] Wellmer, 'Sobre Negatividad y Autonomía del Arte,' 263.

from the masses themselves." (CIR, 12) For Adorno, the works of the culture industry were produced *for* the masses, not by them; and what is more, there was no 'people' or no 'folk' anymore from which a genuine popular culture could emerge.[396] Hence why, for him, the task of preserving genuine forms of collectivity had fallen into autonomous works of art, which—whatever their isolation from existing society—still spoke for those that could not speak for themselves, and thus in the interest of a future, emancipated 'we.' The music of Schoenberg or the plays of Beckett, for example, gave voice to an "alienated, oppressed, and reified 'we,' for the sake of a better and liberated 'we'" as Wellmer contends.[397] Adorno conceived of a collectivity—a *We*—that was an embodiment of what was socially most advanced and which was "encapsuled in the objectivation of works." (AT, 310)[398] This collectivity, for Adorno, should not be confused with that of the currently oppressed masses—which were far from embodying any form of universal or rational 'we.'

Wellmer, however, conceives of a different form of collectivity—one that is neither authentic, already liberated (outside capitalism's 'spell'), nor completely absorbed by the logic of capitalism and its ideological mechanisms. Interestingly, Wellmer speaks of a form of collectivity that emerges from the fissures left by the culture industry. For, according to him, the objects of the culture industry must appropriate elements of the social strata and the groups it is attempting to subsume, but insofar as it is doing this, it is also providing the potential for establishing new identities and a sense of community. In the interaction between the work and its audience, a community of signs and a common identity can be constituted, he contends.[399] And according to him, even when these local and fragile collectives

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[396] See footnotes 283 and 284 above.

[397] Wellmer, 'Sobre Negatividad y Autonomía del Arte,' 250.

[398] See also AT, 53: "Aesthetic autonomy encompasses what is collectively most advanced, what has escaped the spell."

[399] Wellmer, 'Sobre Negatividad y Autonomía del Arte,' 263. See also Diederichsen, 'The Adequacy of Signs,' 41-42.

can become commodified or appropriated by the culture industry, absorbed and turned into consumers, and their fantasies into products, there is always a potential for them to re-emerge. Wellmer writes:

> the subversive and innovating effects of the culture industry allow for the emergence of aspects that establish identity and community, aspects of a trans-subjective articulation of marginalized or oppositional minorities, or of subcultures and youth cultures. These aspects have an emancipatory meaning that is not reducible to alienation.[400]

By bringing these other collective aspects of (popular) music to the fore, Wellmer approaches Negt and Kluge's analysis of the consciousness industry, as expounded in Chapter III, and exposes something artificial, a narrowness, in Adorno's perspective. Indeed, Adorno's analysis of musical forms might have been correct, and his attempt to salvage the truth content of works of art—and with this the utopian possibility of reconciliation—still has much to teach us; but these are not the last words regarding the status of culture. While mass culture can lack historical objectivity, and thus be dismissible from the point of view of a formalist aesthetic theory, it regains its political and aesthetic relevance when through the realization that it can help to organize the experience of the masses. In this sense, the 'truth' of, say, a piece of pop music or of 'street art,' is not objectively given but is rather constructed through its impact and relation to its audiences. Different classes, different groups, will appropriate and use the very same objects in different forms—and give them different meanings. As Stuart Hall has argued:

> [t]he meaning of a cultural symbol is given in part by the social field into which it is incorporated, the practises with which it articulates and is made to resonate. What matters

[400] Wellmer, 'Sobre Negatividad y Autonomía del Arte,' 263.

> is not the intrinsic or historically fixed objects of culture, but the state of play in cultural relations: to put it bluntly and oversimplified form – what counts is the class struggle in and over culture.[401]

If one analyses the culture industry from Adorno's standpoint, one might see nothing but manipulation and reification. But once analysed from the perspective of its reception, it can be shown that, as Diedrich Diederichsen has argued, it constitutes a system different from that of "music music."[402] And this system is one that, as Wellmer puts it, turned out to be "open for a subversive recodification of its signs."[403] Hence why, e.g., pop music, which not for this reason loses its commodified character, can be conceived as a new subcultural language. In line with Negt and Kluge, Wellmer therefore argues that it is not possible to conceive of the culture industry as a closed system that absorbs every trace of subversion and non-identity. Contrary to Adorno's thesis, it turns out that in the culture industry publics are formed which might not (yet) be the global subject that will bring about a radical social change, but that are oppositional, emancipatory and subversive (publics which Negt and Kluge call counter-public spheres).

In order to illustrate the consequences of Wellmer's turn to reception and of his attempt to rescue the 'truth potential' of art, in what follows I provide an example that shows how popular culture and its reception have helped in the constitution of social groups and movements. I thus refer to the way in which the reception of the music and image of David Bowie in the 1970s allowed gay and queer individuals to gain or expand their self-understanding and to reinterpret their needs and interests. Further, I contend, without necessarily intending to, these provided the symbolic means with which

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[401] Stuart Hall, "Notes on deconstructing 'the popular'," in *People's History and Socialist Theory*, ed. R. Samuel et. al., (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 235.

[402] Diederichsen, 'The Adequacy of Signs,' 38.

[403] Wellmer, 'Sobre Negatividad y Autonomía del Arte,' 260-261.

these individuals could express themselves in public and rearticulate their needs, thereby indirectly intervening in the constitution of a counter-public sphere.

III.1 David Bowie and the Fight for Gender Identities

Wellmer claims that, contrary to the Adornian thesis where the culture industry is presented as a totalizing system of delusion, and its public as bearers of a regressive consciousness,

> there is just as much positive potential for democratization and the unleashing of aesthetic imagination as there is potential for cultural regression in rock music and in the attitudes, skills and modes of perception which have developed around it. It is ambivalences such as these, as in the case of jazz, that we ought to defend against Adorno. (TSR, 33)

It has become especially fashionable today to consider pop music, commercial films, even advertisements, as sites of subversion, but with Wellmer, I think that, instead of presenting the industry in any such flattened-out terms, what is important is the ambivalence within those objects and the modes of perception of its audiences. That ambivalence allows to see in the culture industry both regression, and innovation (of, e.g., forms of seeing or identities.)[404]

It is also important to keep in mind that the focus here should not be (not only, at least) on the objects themselves—perhaps still only produced for the sake of profiting from subversive

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[404] Note that in this case Wellmer might also be criticized as being too unfair with Adorno who, at least in his late work, was not so blind to this ambivalence. See, e.g. Adorno's comments on the culture industry in 'Transparencies on Film,' a 1966 essay: "In its attempts to manipulate the masses the ideology of the culture industry itself becomes as internally antagonistic as the very society which it aims to control. The ideology of the culture industry contains the antidote to its own lie. No other plea could be made for its defense." (Adorno, 'Transparencies on Film,' 202) This, however, does not disprove Wellmer's point about Adorno's earlier and most known work on the culture industry, or that about the potential of the culture industry.

energies—but on the way aesthetic objects (including pop music, literature, films, television icons, Instagram stars) are being "*used* by subaltern groups to construct particular rather than overarching hegemonic identities," as George Yúdice notes.[405] It is here, in their reception or appropriation, that these objects gain social significance. I emphasize the fact that these cultural objects are *used* in order to highlight the context of reception and the fact that even those individuals that one might consider to be most oppressed and shaped (by capitalism, by the stereotyping of the culture industry) are still able to

> negotiate and manage the heterogeneity of perspectives by which they are variously imagined, valued, and devalued, . . . on the basis of class, sex, race, religion, regional provenance, and other "subject" positions.[406]

It is in that process of negotiation that the culture industry can actualize its truth potential.

In what follows, I exemplify this by focusing on the relation between the gay subculture and the music and image of the British musician and performer David Bowie, in order to illustrate some of that 'positive' potential which I have discussed in relation to Negt and Kluge's and Wellmer's work. Bowie's music, I argue, was used by members of the queer and gay community in order to develop new forms of expression and discourse with which to articulate their needs, which had only begun to emerge in the public sphere.

One of the events that brought David Bowie into the spotlight of gay culture and made him a potential object for a counter-hegemonic appropriation was a now (in)famous interview in the magazine *Melody Maker* on January 1972—an interview that was to become a watershed for popular

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[405] George Yúdice, 'For A Practical Aesthetics,' in *The Phantom Public Sphere*, ed. Bruce Robbins, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 219. My emphasis.
[406] Yúdice, 'For A Practical Aesthetics,' 219.

and queer culture. Dressed as 'Ziggy Stardust,' (one of his multiple personae)—a satin jacket and tight polka-dot pants, makeup, orange hair—Bowie self-identified himself in public television as "gay" (or, he then clarified, as "bisexual.")[407] Today, this might sound innocent, not subversive at all, but at that time, admitting one's sexual orientation in public was not common, and had something subversive.[408]

To put this in context, it was not until 1967 that publicly identifying oneself as a homosexual became legal in the UK, and in that decade violent outbursts of violence against homosexuals—like those that triggered the Stonewall Rebellion of 1969—were still common. The closing of the 1960s had been permeated by the sense that the usual binary gender categories had become stale, constraining; and yet, the need to give expression to a different way of self-definition through one's sexual orientation had not yet really become publicly available. As Cagle recounts, in his book on 'glam rock' and pop subcultures,

> [by] January 1972, gay culture had not yet emerged with an overtly consistent and culturally acknowledged iconography, even among white male homosexuals. Gay liberation, the demand for gay rights, and gay activism in general, were in their formative stages. Consider that just three years prior to Bowie's *Melody Maker* interview, the Stonewall riots had helped to spark the nationwide grassroots liberation effort. By 1972, gay protests, direct political organizing, and a spreading of national movement to "come out" were considered important strategies in building a radical front that viewed gays as victims of homophobic

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[407] David Bowie, in Van M. Cagle. *Reconstructing Pop/Subculture: Art, Rock, and Andy Warhol*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1995), 2.

[408] Apparently, it could even lead one to prison: "[B]etween 1967 and 2003, 30,000 gay and bisexual men were convicted for behaviour that would not have been a crime had their partner been a woman." Geraldine Bedell, 'Coming out of the Dark Ages,' *The Guardian*, June 24, 2007. https://www.theguardian.com/society/2007/jun/24/communities.gayrights.

> oppression ... coming out became a prolific political statement.[409]

It was in this context that the figure of David Bowie emerged as one vehicle (among others) that provided many gays and lesbians with the symbolic tools with which to articulate their needs, and also allowed them to develop a sense of solidarity through their shared exclusion, thereby helping the gay community come together *as a community*. Bowie's music—a mixture of pop sounds with ambivalent lyrics—touched upon that sense of 'otherness' and alienation which was shared by many gays and lesbians. His use of subversive performative elements drawn from Andy Warhol's pop art, or the jumping-over established gender norms in public, were 'new' in the context of the hegemonic public sphere and the culture industry, and yet these were—as aesthetic devices—already *passé*. The mixture between Bowie's appearance, his words, and the current social and historical context, made of what might have been a sheer publicity stunt a truly 'world-disclosing' moment for many people who felt, like Ziggy Stardust, alienated, 'othered.' Bowie's 'coming out' *in public* gave visibility to a heretofore repressed issue and, in so doing, he facilitated its politicization. After that moment, Bowie's image became a representation—whether this was his intention is not, in this case, the adequate question—of an openness to "try on lifestyles," which could be an "*artful* signification of androgynous, nonstraight style and attitude."[410]

The persona of David Bowie/Ziggy Stardust was appropriated by mass audiences and transformed into a 'symbol' of resistance and novelty. His music videos, his media presence, as Hebdige contends, were used

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[409] Cagle, *Reconstructing Pop/Subculture*, 12. Note that this does not mean that Bowie had any underlying political intentions. In a sense, from the perspective portrayed here, this is not what matters. What does is that it had a political impact regardless.

[410] Cagle, *Reconstructing Pop/Subculture*, 11-12.

> … in order to construct an alternative identity which communicated a perceived difference: an Otherness. [Bowie's fans] were, in short, challenging at a symbolic level the 'inevitability', the 'naturalness' of class and gender stereotypes.[411]

The appearance of Bowie on mass media allowed a dispersed group of people (so far united only by a shared feeling a need to subjectify their sexuality differently) to fight for a social space were their identities could be, in Hebdige's words, "discovered and expressed," insofar as he gave legitimacy to their concerns by making them public.[412]

Bowie functioned as a sort of seismograph and developed his image by tapping himself into popular culture. He was thus "capable of identifying the desire for change apparent in youth culture in the 60s and 70s, and anticipate a relevant response that captured the public imagination," as Bradley writes.[413] Notably, Bowie was, in the first place, appropriating his 'raw material' from culturally available products and desires—both materials of popular culture like Warhol's theatricals, as Cagle notes, but also from the latent feelings and needs for expression of many people that could not openly express their sexual preferences without becoming victims of social injuries.[414] But more importantly at this stage was that the cultural (re)appropriation also happened in the other direction, i.e. from the 'bottom up,' as Negt and Kluge would put it.

It was not just that the artist could survey culture and serve it to the audiences, turning them into passive consumers. Of course this happened—and that the political strength of David Bowie has now became partially absorbed by the industry attests to this. However, it was also the case that those

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[411] Dick Hebdige, *Subculture. The Meaning of Style,* (London: Routledge, 2002), 89.

[412] Hebdige, *Subculture*, 88.

[413] Peri Bradley and James Page, 'David Bowie – the trans who fell to earth: cultural regulation, Bowie and gender fluidity,' *Continuum* 31:4, (2017): 586.

[414] See, e.g., Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 106-107.

who were to become Bowie's fans also appropriated his image, and transformed it *for their own purposes*. Ultimately, it was the individuals who had little if any public power and voice within the hegemonic public sphere that made of the image of Bowie a representation of "difference as a positive and rebellious force that gave them the opportunity to express their true nature and experiment with their identity in an act of self-expression."[415]

What Bowie's media presence created, thus, was the possibility for his and her listeners "to construct the performer's identities *in terms of their own identities and desires*."[416] Bowie became a means, a vessel, where the people's needs for a new identity were projected, becoming gaining progressively more public presence. In this case, as van Cagle puts it, popular culture became "a method for unlocking the possibilities of subcultural practice on a wider scale."[417] Contrary to what Adorno contended, then, it is possible to be *within* mass culture (or the culture industry), and transmit subversive, counter-hegemonic ideas.

This processual relation between receiver and 'text' (or aesthetic object) (which Wellmer characterizes as a play of identification and differentiation between the receiver and the aesthetic object) captures adequately the way in which many 'fans' identify with their performers, and clarifies functional dimension in which art is emancipatory. As Simon Critchley writes in a recent collection of essays:

> There is a world of people for whom Bowie was the being who permitted a powerful emotional connection and freed them to become some other kind of self, something freer,

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[415] Bradley and Page, 'David Bowie – the trans who fell to earth,' 588.

[416] Phillip Auslander, *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality in Popular Music*, (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 234. My emphasis.

[417] Cagle, *Reconstructing Pop/Subculture,* 217.

more queer, more honest, more open, and more exciting.[418]

Similar claims could be made, e.g., of jazz music—so decried by Adorno—or of many Hollywood films. In all of these cases, the receiving subject is able to gain a better self-understanding through the (re)appropriation of pop and mass culture. What 'high' autonomous art is able to do for those knowledgeable enough to interpret it truthfully, is something that popular and mass art can also achieve for those without those privileges: namely, triggering processes of revelation or world-disclosure, thereby bursting subjects out of the social categories and norms that constrain them. But additionally, contrary to autonomous art, this can be made in public, hence opposing the type of (isolated, contemplative) reception that Adorno prescribes and that—in Habermas' words—leads "down the royal road to bourgeois individuation."[419] Instead, by happening *in* public, the reception of mass culture can help in the constitution of counter-public spheres.

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The above example is intended to illustrate the emancipatory side of popular music. What for Adorno was a single, flat, and seamless industry, whose main purpose was to erase differences and to reproduce the audience as consumers,[420] or what he characterized as a mechanism whereby people gave up their individuality for a false sense of security (that of the crowd),[421] can be seen, both Wellmer's and Negt and Kluge's work show, as consisting of a multiplicity of forms. But more importantly, they can also

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[418] Simon Critchley, *Bowie,* (New York: OR Books, 2014), 17.

[419] Habermas, 'Consciousness-Raising or Redemptive Criticism,' 44.

[420] "Culture today is infecting everything with sameness. Film, radio, and magazines form a system." (DE, 94)

[421] Theodor Adorno, 'On Popular Music,' in *Essays on Music*, Richard Leppert (ed.), trans. Susan H. Gillespie, (Berkley: University of California Press, 2002), 455.

allow us to see cultural consumers as more than deluded and manipulated 'regressive listeners,' to use Adorno's phrase.

From Wellmer's perspective, shared by Negt and Kluge, the relation between mass culture and audience is much more complex, and while this industry plays a legitimizing role for capitalism, it is also the case that individuals can appropriate and (re)contextualize cultural objects and use them to express their needs and desires, to help them maintain their cultural identity, to form bonds of solidarity against the flattening tendencies of capitalism. The subcultures, social movements, and counter-public spheres that have emerged partly (yet not exclusively) through the appropriation of cultural objects, have inverted the logic of appropriation of capitalism, and used these media in order to reappropriate their needs, thus giving shape to their otherwise blind fantasies and protest energies. Commodities are also vessels where collective identities can be configured, and where new social groups, marginalized or misrepresented in the hegemonic culture, can come into being.

In this case, when the question becomes political rather than aesthetic or epistemological—the validity of a work of art or its truthful representation of a (false) reality become secondary. More important becomes asking: What is the social significance of certain works of art or culture *in relation to* emerging counter-publics?[422] Putting too much of an emphasis on the formal construction, complexity, or the structure of certain works of art or culture, can even prevent us, as Jochen Schulte-Sasse writes,

> from seeing that literary media and the public spheres of cultural production are to be highly prized socially because they make it possible for individuals to work through their

[422] See e.g. Felski's *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics* for a case study of the uses of literature in the feminist counter-public sphere.

> material experiences and understand them as "consciously" as they can.[423]

Turning toward the reception of culture can help us understand how people that remain oppressed, reified and alienated have been able to articulate their experiences, turning their needs into political demands, and organizing themselves into counter-public spheres, which are the object of the next chapter.

[423] Jochen Schulte-Sasse, 'Foreword: Theory of Modernism versus Theory of the Avant-Garde,' in Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, xxvi.

Chapter V: The Public Sphere, Social Movements, and Counter-Public Spheres

The work of Albrecht Wellmer unearths a critical dimension within the reception of mass and popular forms of art and culture. By focusing on the reception of aesthetic objects and, therewith, on the aesthetic *experience*, Wellmer shows that works of art and cultural objects have a truth potential that is independent from the work's aesthetic validity and import, as from their autonomy. This potential, rather, refers to the capacity to interfere (via the receiving subject) with social and historical problems by changing the preconceptions receivers have of reality and of themselves—something that had become second nature is exposed as contingent, or a feeling (say, a sense of discomfort) that could not be articulated becomes apprehensible. Wellmer's work, thus, expands the emancipatory power of art to include a functional dimension that had been lost to Adorno, and, in so doing, shows that 'political artworks' can no longer close their eyes and ears against society.[424] As he writes:

> art has a function in connection with forms of non-aesthetic communication or of a real change in ways of understanding ourselves and the world. (TSR, 21)

In this vein, one could wonder whether, e.g., a message of "non-violence" and "political paralysis" is better conveyed by works of high literature, such as Kafka's, or by, e.g., a music video such as Childish Gambino's 'This is America' (2018), or Jordan Peele's film *Get Out* (2017), both of which had a huge mass impact on the Black freedom struggle. Wellmer's work allows us to resignify the social significance and political impact of the latter works (even if these are not necessarily aesthetically valid, and are certainly not 'autonomous' in Adorno's sense.) In so doing, it also permits one to re-functionalize the 'political' in art: just as Negt and Kluge, Wellmer locates the subversive,

[424] Adorno, 'Commitment,' 89. See footnote 126 above.

emancipatory potential of the aesthetic in the mediation between work, receiver, and social domain, and not within the work itself.[425] It is by acting as mediators between individuals and the social structures that works of art and culture can allow for the public emergence of marginalized, local, or otherwise excluded publics.[426] With such a move, as Felski comments, art becomes conceivable as

> a medium which can profoundly influence individual and cultural self-understanding in the sphere of everyday life, charting the changing preoccupations of social groups through symbolic fictions by means of which they make sense of experience.[427]

This implies that to understand whether a work of art or culture is politically progressive, an internal analysis of the works of art is not sufficient, and might even block us from capturing the way in which it can become a means for the development of a critical consciousness.

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Art and culture can be vehicles for change, but as the above already highlights, their political significance will only be such if they help bring about social and structural changes. As Walter Benjamin was aware, the politicization of artworks must make it possible for "a mass population grown conscious of its own power" to "[appropriate] politics." (TSR, 34)[428] But what exactly would such an appropriation of the political amount to? And how can art and, more broadly, aesthetic objects

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[425] Similarly, Negt and Kluge comment that while intellectual and artistic activity "objectify social experience" this says nothing of the organization (on a political level) of the experiences of the masses. (PSE, 175-177)

[426] Wellmer, 'Sobre Negatividad y Autonomía del Arte,' 263.

[427] Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*, 7.

[428] See also Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' in *Illuminations. Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn, (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 242: "[Mankind's] self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic. Communism responds by politicizing art."

practices, help a mass population permeated by self-alienation and reification, grow conscious? Throughout this chapter, I address these questions by turning back to Negt and Kluge's work on the 'public sphere,' a site that, as Kluge defines it, is "the space in which politics is first made possible at all and communicable."[429] The public sphere, I contend, makes politics possible when it manages to increase the possibilities to articulate otherwise silenced experiences in public—and, as we have seen, the aesthetic is well suited for this task.[430]

By 'counter-public spheres'—a constitutive part of the public sphere—Negt and Kluge are referring to social movements, oppositional subcultures, or subaltern groups that come together and (often with the aid of aesthetic means) articulate and express their needs, interests, and eventually formulate these as political demands. The public sphere of capitalism is thus reconstrued as a plural and diverse arena, and as a site ruled by conflict and hegemonic struggles.[431] As we will see, Negt and Kluge contend that, given the conditions of late capitalism, we cannot aim to transform—in a single pass—the whole mass population into one constituted of autonomous, self-conscious individuals. Hence why, despite their diversity and the threat of fragmentation, counter-public spheres are central for achieving a radical and rational social change.

Following Negt and Kluge, I argue that within counter-public spheres various social constituencies can express their particular needs and interests and articulate their *self-experiences* of oppression. In so doing, Negt and Kluge contend, subjects can begin to develop a critical

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429 Kluge, 'On Film and the Public Sphere,' 40.

430 Kluge, 'On Film and the Public Sphere,' 38.

431 This does not mean that all conflicts are necessarily irreducible, or that the public sphere has to be necessarily fragmented, but does say something about the state of capitalist societies—partitioned by class, racial, gendered divisions, to name a few. How to avoid fragmenting the public sphere will be discussed in detail below and in Chapter VI.

consciousness, while preserving the diversity and particularity of needs and interests—something necessary for the constitution of a truly rational and 'global' subject.[432] Negt and Kluge's work, thus, also shows that cultural and value pluralism are not at odds with 'universality' *as such*. Rather, the proliferation of the 'particular' voices of many movements, like feminism or the Civil Rights movement, shows the limitations of a universalism based on abstract and empty concepts that cannot accommodate for specific needs based on gender, race, ethnicity, age, sexual preferences, and so forth. Counter-public spheres, I conclude, play a transitional but necessary role in the constitution of a 'global' subject.

As I detail throughout the chapter, however, not all forms of particularity are virtuous, nor is the focus on pluralism without its problems. This is because—as the proliferation of a 'post-modern' discourse shows—the focus on difference; a fetishism of 'identity,' 'authenticity,' and 'recognition;' or an abstract emphasis on particularity, *can* lead to the fragmentation of the social fabric (as opposed to cooperation) or to an abstract and wholesale negation of rationality. This is something that would complicate abolishing the capitalist logic from which oppression emanates. Negt and Kluge's work on the public sphere is important because, aware of this danger, they insist on the possibility of a "collective social synthesis" where the social organization of production is determined consciously, collectively, and autonomously.[433] At stake is the possibility for individuals to preserve their particular interests while acting together in rationally self-determining the organization of their whole 'social

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[432] In the Introduction, to recall, I contended that, with Adorno, a truly radical society would have to be one where universality and particularity are synthesized non-violently. It is in this sense, I argue, that counter-publics play a necessary if insufficient role in achieving a radical social change. See Introduction, section I.

[433] Hohendahl, *The Institution of Criticism*, 264. As Hohendahl notes, this element brings Negt and Kluge close to Habermas' intentions, despite their critique of Habermas' own model, which will be developed throughout the chapter. However, I argue in the final chapter, this interest is defined negatively, and regards ending oppression and alienation, and overcoming the block to the autonomous unfolding of capacities and experiences.

horizon of experience,' i.e. the site "in which everything that is actually or ostensibly relevant for all members of society is integrated." (PSE, 2) The question is whether counter-publics can, first, see beyond the 'cultural expression' of their suffering, and second, see themselves as part of a broader struggle to transform the oppressive structures of capitalism. This question is the focus of Chapter VI.

I begin by discussing the concept of the 'bourgeois' public sphere as conceptualized by Habermas in his book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere,* which is the starting point for Negt and Kluge's discussion on counter-publics. I also touch upon the role that art and culture play, according to Habermas' account, in the formation of a 'bourgeois' subjectivity. This serves as an example that further illustrates the discussion on aesthetic reception as developed in Chapter IV, and that highlights the limitations of the role assigned to the aesthetic in Habermas' early work (section I). Following, I turn to Negt and Kluge's criticism of that model. This model is found wanting, since it is based on a limiting understanding of 'rational' interaction, and on abstract notions of impartiality and inclusion that have become problematic vis-à-vis the particular needs and interests of individuals and groups (section II). Finally, I reconstruct Negt and Kluge's notion of 'counter-public spheres' and asses its virtues and limits (section III). As I argue, the relevance of counter-public spheres lies in their potential to generate critical thought, or what I call their 'consciousness-raising' function. This shows in a different light the emancipatory dimension of cultural and identity struggles (section III.1). Those counter-publics, however, have limits: As Negt and Kluge argue, both a theory of the public sphere and movements seeking practical change need to come to terms with the fact that only through joint collective action can a true social transformation be achieved (section III.2).

Negt and Kluge's work enables us to understand that counter-public spheres—*because of* their plurality—are central for the constitution of a collective, autonomous, and emancipatory movement. Achieving the latter would require, however, the construction of a new, more encompassing form of

social organization which Negt and Kluge call the 'proletarian' public sphere, on which I focus on the final chapter.

I) Habermas and the (Bourgeois) Public Sphere

The concept of the 'public sphere' was developed by Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, a historical and sociological account of the emergence, development and decline of a category that has become central for political theory and a key notion to understand democratic societies and the role of civil society therein. The notion of the 'public sphere' unearthed the relation between the socio-cultural and the political-economic systems, and allowed Habermas to reconceive the meaning of the categories of 'public' and 'private.' The public sphere, as a specifically modern phenomenon, was the product of the social transformations that occurred in the transition from monarchical rule towards democracy and, analogously, from feudalism to capitalism.

The central sociohistorical change, for Habermas, regards the way in which power, previously represented *before* the people, starts emanating *from* the people.[434] This change is made possible when the emerging bourgeois class begins to recognize its own interests as different from those of the state—in a process that was partly derived from the "private autonomy" enjoyed by male property owners, and partly furthered by the existence of a 'literary public sphere.' Both of these, Habermas argues, trigger a process of self-understanding whereby the bourgeoise subjects come to conceive themselves as representatives of 'humanity' writ large.[435] This motivated these individuals, as 'private persons,' to get together in order to critically and rationally discuss matters of (what they considered

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[434] Jürgen Habermas, 'The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article,' *New German Critique*, No. 3, (Autumn, 1974): 51.
[435] Habermas, 'The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article,' 51.

to be) general or public concern, slowly appropriating the public sphere away from the absolutist state's "monopoly on interpretation."[436] The only legitimate source of power thus becomes, according to Habermas, the public use of reason, and rationally reached consensus comes to be seen as the base for the sovereignty of the people. (STPS, 107)

I will not go into a detailed discussion of Habermas' account of the genesis and decline of the bourgeois public sphere, nor of his later reassessments of the role of the public sphere in Western democracies.[437] For the purposes of this work, I only focus on those aspects which are relevant to understand the broader discussion regarding counter-publics, the political role of the aesthetic, as well as those elements necessary to understand Negt and Kluge's criticism. In order to do this, I first give a brief sketch of the characteristics of Habermas' model and then turn to the role that art and the aesthetic dimension played in the formation of this particular (bourgeois) public sphere. In the next section, I turn to Negt and Kluge's criticisms of this model, and refer to some of the reassessments Habermas made of his early model when these allow me to illustrate or clarify those criticisms.[438]

I.1 What is the 'Bourgeois' Public Sphere? Habermas' Model

Habermas' model of the bourgeois public sphere is predicated on the idea that state power should be legitimated through a *rationally reached consensus*: through rational debate, the public sphere made out of

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[436] Hohendahl, *The Institution of Criticism*, 247.

[437] This was developed mostly in Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms. Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. William Rehg, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), section 8: 'Civil Society and the Political Public Sphere.'

[438] Note that Negt and Kluge's work is focused on the model of the bourgeois public sphere as developed by Habermas in *Structural Transformation*. Habermas' later transformations of his model, as we will see, actually redress some of the problems of the early model and are more sensitive to pluralism.

private individuals come together as a public, was to hold the state accountable for its decisions and actions. This involved both a demand for transparency, or the public access to information, and the critical scrutiny (by civil society) of state activities, which had to live up to the 'general' interests of civil society—interests which were to emerge through rational debate.[439] As Nancy Fraser notes, the idea of the public sphere therefore designates both an institutional mechanism for '"rationalizing" political domination,' as well as a form of discursive interaction.[440]

According to Habermas, for this deliberation to be deemed truly rational, the public sphere needs to achieve, first, the unrestricted access to everyone. This was to be achieved not by "presupposing the equality of status, [but by disregarding] status altogether." (STPS, 36) This implies that for the public sphere to count as 'rational,' people must participate in it *as if* they were equal. Second, the discussion presupposed, as Habermas writes, the "problematization of areas that until then had not been questioned." (STPS, 36) Thus, the 'monopoly of interpretation' was wrested away from the state and the church. Notably, even in the case of cultural objects, Habermas argues, their meaning had to be determined "on their own" and not imputed externally. Importantly, this meant that their meaning had to be "verbalized," stating explicitly what was it that allowed the (cultural object, social norm) to "assert its authority." (STPS, 37) Note, however, that if certain interests could not be fully expressed or articulated, these were to be considered 'private' and left out of the discussion, which should regard matters of general concern. Finally, Habermas argues that the public was, in principle, inclusive: "However exclusive the public might be in any given instance, it could

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[439] Nancy Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,' *Social Text*, No. 25/26, (1990): 58-59.

[440] Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere,' 59.

never close itself off entirely and become consolidated as a clique." (STPS, 37) Whoever participated in the public sphere, that is, had to understand itself as the voice of all society.

In sum, Habermas' model depends on the idea of rational discussion and the legitimacy of argumentative reason (what Habermas later understood as 'the unforced force of the better argument' is already adumbrated here) from which he derives the following characteristics: First, open access and disregard of (e.g. social, gender, class) status. Second, the problematization of what had been previously taken for granted. Insofar as these issues could be put to rational discussion, they could become matter of 'public' discussion—and if a consensus could be reached about them through discussion, the problems themselves were deemed matters of general (i.e. public) interest. Finally, the model is predicated on the principle of inclusivity, according to which everyone was a potential member of the public. Habermas constructs—by abstracting from the conditions of early liberal and bourgeois society—a model of the public sphere which can then be deployed, according to him, to criticize the conditions of late capitalism, especially what he sees as its democratic deficit.

I.2 The Literary Public Sphere

An important aspect of Habermas' account of the bourgeois public sphere which tends to be overlooked regards the relation between culture and politics. Through the reception and discussion of works of art, Habermas argues, the bourgeois individuals came to understand themselves as the members of a 'universal' class, or as Habermas puts it, as members of a "common humanity." (STPS, 36) According to him, it was this self-understanding—where the categories of *bourgeois* and *human being* converged—that allowed for the development of the political dimension of the public sphere. Without this self-understanding, the liberal ideas of universal access, equality, and rational consensus, could not have emerged when they did, or would have done it under a different guise.

Art and culture (in this case literature), as Habermas accounts, acted as media that—to go back to Wellmer's account of aesthetic 'truth potential'—affected its public in a way that allowed its members to become aware of their (political, social) situation, to gain a self-interpretation of their needs and interests, and to think differently of the role of the state. Literature, in this case, provided the tools with which the bourgeois class, *qua* public of readers, could interpret and articulate its needs. This led, eventually, to the formation of a 'political' public that could demand the fulfilment of those needs, and even ended up playing a fundamental role in the transformation of the political sphere.

In this vein, Habermas argues that the discussion of literature, around which a public sphere started to emerge, acted as the

> training ground for a critical public reflection still preoccupied with itself—a process of self-clarification of private people focusing on the genuine experiences of their novel privateness. (STPS, 29)

The novel of the late 18th century brought together the author, work, and the public, and "allowed anyone to enter into the literary action as a substitute for his own." (STPS, 50) In identifying with the fictive characters, members of its public could reconceptualize their subjectivity and their relations with reality. But what is more, learning from their discussions, people stopped taking the works of art for granted. This was also facilitated by the fact that the latter were slowly becoming detached from moral, religious, or political functions. Because of these two, individuals could also problematize the work's 'legitimacy.' In line with Wellmer's account, this legitimacy no longer (or not only) referred to the 'aesthetic validity' of the works, but to the possibility for the audience to come to terms with their reality *through* the aesthetic 'consumption.' A now 'popularized' culture (STPS, 50-51) was thus (re)appropriated by the audience. As Habermas writes, culture "was claimed as the ready topic of a discussion through which an audience-oriented subjectivity communicated with itself." (STPS, 29)

Habermas' account of the literary public sphere provides an empirical example of the relation between art and its receivers, and of the way this transforms (and builds) subjects' identities through a process of self-clarification—a reflexive process triggered through aesthetic devices, and whereby needs and interests which lie hidden within the subject start to become transparent. This relation between art (or aesthetic objects in general) and its receiving audience is still central for the constitution of what are today known as counter-public spheres or new social movements, which construct their shared interests and needs through a common investment in aesthetic symbols or objects. Negt and Kluge's conceptualization of these publics—otherwise excluded from the public sphere or from the official political avenues—and their political function, a function central for the constitution of a truly 'rational' society, is the focus of the sections that follow.

Despite its centrality for the constitution of the bourgeois identity (and the correlated bourgeois public sphere) however, neither literature nor other aesthetic means play a prominent role in Habermas' later analysis of the transformation (and possible reconstitution) of the public sphere. This is partly due to the fact that Habermas' account of the disintegration of the public sphere was heavily influenced by Adorno and Horkheimer's analysis of the culture industry.[441] In line with Adorno, in *Structural Transformation* Habermas considers that the 'massification' of culture and the rise of the culture industry have 'colonized' the sphere of the 'popular.' Rational-critical reception is replaced by consumption, and the externalization (or public-orientation) of reason, nurtured in cafes and salons, is replaced by "acts of individuated reception," Habermas argues. (STPS, 161) In his most pessimistic moments, Habermas goes as far as claiming that lower prices and more purchasing power did not lead to cultural emancipation and the development of autonomous reason, but to a lowering

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[441] See, e.g., Hohendahl, *The Institution of Criticism*, 244-245 and Adorno, 'On the Fetish Character in Music.'

of the "threshold capacity required for appreciation" of culture.[442] In his later work—especially in *Between Facts and Norms*—Habermas was to qualify these assessments, adding some more nuance to his criticism. However, Habermas does not truly develop further the relation between politics and aesthetics or the political role that the appropriation of culture can play. This task, as we have seen, was left for Negt and Kluge (and Wellmer) to pursue.

II) Problems with the Model of the Bourgeois Public Sphere

At face value, there is much to be defended in Habermas' model. After all, it would be hard to deny that values like equality, freedom of access and assembly, a discussion open to all, should be part of any political and democratic discussion within the public sphere. However, it might also turn out to be that those values, when taken abstractly, deprived of any content, are either too limited, or can even become ideological mechanisms that inadvertently justify the exclusion of certain publics or social issues. Furthermore, it has become increasingly problematic to continue referring (either empirically or normatively) to the public sphere in the singular, overlooking or undermining the contribution of many counter-publics for democracy. Finally, just as problematic is to disavow the 'rational' core of aesthetic means (such as happenings, performances, protests, music festivals) through which many otherwise-silenced individuals can acquire public visibility. Sticking too strictly to the model developed by Habermas in *Structural Transformation*, eclipses the critical task of comprehending the rational and democratic core of a range of counter-publics, as of the events or situations where these emerge or participate.

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442 Craig Calhoun, 'Introduction: Habermas and the Public Sphere,' in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 23.

What could someone holding on to Habermas' early perspective say about, e.g., Beyoncé's Half-Time show at the Super Bowl in 2016? Was this a musical performance? A political statement? A media stunt? Making reference to Malcolm X and the Jackson Five, to Black Live Matter and her "Givenchy dress," the musician left some of the more than 100 million spectators in confusion; others were overwhelmed or felt empowered. Journalists and experts could not decide, as columnist and professor Daphne Brooks wrote in *The Guardian*, whether her show was an "insurgent assault on the media (or [a] shamelessly vacuous infomercial)."[443] This performance clearly transgressed the normative standards of the 'bourgeois' public sphere, and does not satisfy the requirements to be deemed worthy of public discussion, nor (much less) does the event, by itself, make any sort of 'rational' argument. But does this mean that we should merely turn away from events such as this one, and focus rather on 'official' politics? Does this mean there is no critical or rational core to it?

This, clearly, would be wrong, and not only because today more than ever, mass events such as this one have become the means through which debates on e.g. racial inequality, the stereotyping of the Latin community, or police brutality take place. Further, performances such as Beyoncé's, despite their commercial character, are the means through which many young Black women reassess their identities and stop feeling powerless. It is through events like this one (as well as protests, marches, through civil disobedience) that happen 'outside' the norms of the hegemonic public sphere, and that deploy aesthetic rather than 'argumentative' or conceptual means, that 'politics' today—as the intentional or non-intentional raising of consciousness and critique—is taking place. From this perspective, it would be mistaken to negate that this performance *is* a rational contribution to the

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[443] Daphne A. Brooks, 'How #BlackLivesMatter started a musical revolution,' *The Guardian*, March 13, 2016. https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/mar/13/black-lives-matter-beyonce-kendrick-lamar-protest.

public sphere, and to the politicization of society. Situations such as this call for a reassessment of the meaning of the public sphere, and of the desirability of the 'bourgeois' model.

In what follows, I provide this reassessment by reconstructing Negt and Kluge's criticism of the 'bourgeois' public sphere. To do so, I focus mainly on (i) the notion of a 'rational' discussion, (ii) the ideals of impartiality, neutrality, and a strong notion of consensus, and (iii) on the ideal of inclusivity and the assumption that there should be a singular public sphere. With the proliferation of counter-public spheres, subcultures, and social movements, many which appeal to aesthetic or performative devises; in view of the prevailing pluralism of needs, interests and values; and given the material and symbolic inequality, a model based on the aforementioned notions becomes suspect. Hence why, according to Negt and Kluge, the 'bourgeois' public sphere cannot be conceived (not in our current society, at the very least) as the normative standard nor as a guide for political praxis.[444] Their critique is particularly relevant in view of the social function and self-understanding of many publics and social movements whose emancipatory project, as Felski puts it, "no longer appeals to an idea of universality but is directed toward an affirmation of specificity in relation to gender, race, ethnicity, age, sexual preference, and so on."[445]

I support Negt and Kluge's critique with those deployed by some other commentators such as Jodi Dean, Nancy Fraser, and Miriam Hansen, whose accounts of the public sphere and counter-publicity will help me clarify the issues raised by Negt and Kluge. This is necessary, because not every

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[444] Arguably, this model was problematic even for the period analysed by Habermas, since it already excluded, e.g., black publics, female publics, proletarian publics. See for example Geoff Eley, 'Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century,' or Mary P. Ryan, 'Gender and Public Access: Women's Politics in Nineteenth-Century America,' both in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. See also Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

[445] Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*, 166.

argument contained in *Public Sphere and Experience* has aged equally well, and the theory of counter-public spheres can easily get lost among the variety of arguments and material contained in Negt and Kluge's work. Habermas himself, as we will see, has substantially transformed his understanding of the public sphere—showing awareness of the current political issues as well as sensitivity toward the criticisms deployed against him. This, I contend, provides further support to Negt and Kluge's critique.

II.1 'Rational' Discussion

In view of the proliferation of multiple publics and contexts of living, Habermas' early conception of what counts as 'rational' forms of interaction or expression (limited to argumentative and deliberative discussion) appears to be too narrow. A logocentric, argumentative notion of deliberation and an understanding of reason based on linguistic communication, to begin with, is not sensitive to other "aesthetic" practices and forms of expression. Those forms of expression, however, have been used by many subaltern social groups and counter-publics in order to create bonds of solidarity, but also to find the means to express their needs and interests, or to gain a self-clarification of their *own* identities (and not just absorb these from what is expected of them). All of these, as I have mentioned before, are legitimate forms of expression and interaction, and do not fit the model of a rationality geared toward a general consensus as developed in Habermas' *Structural Transformation*. As I mentioned in I.2 above, this oversight led Habermas (in his early works) to underestimate the rational core of 'aesthetic' forms of interaction and expression, and to overlook their political dimension.[446]

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[446] The aesthetic here needs to be broadly construed as non-discursive, non-judgemental, and sensual modes of perception and behaviour. The aesthetic is thus much more than a discourse related to art and beauty. See, e.g., Kompridis, 'Introduction' to *The Aesthetic Turn in Political Thought*, xvi. See also footnote 29 above.

In this vein, Elsa Barkley Brown has described the role of the church, which acted as a site of refugee for Black people after slavery ended in the USA. A counter-public sphere began to emerge here, preserving the culture and modes of expression of Black Americans, which had no possibility to participate in the official public sphere. As Barkley Brown recounts:

> ... by the very nature of their participation—the inclusion of women and children, the engagement through prayer, the disregard of formal rules for speakers and audience, the engagement of the galleries in the formal legislative sessions [through shouted interventions]—Afro-Richmonders challenged liberal bourgeois notions of rational discourse.[447]

There was a similar role played by what is now known as 'consciousness raising' groups, which were central in the early stages of the feminist movement (and to an extent still are).[448] There, women were allowed to speak from a first-person perspective about their experiences, something for which forms like narrative and poetry were central, since part of the task was to come up with ways of expressing experiences for which no concepts yet existed.[449] It was thus that members of some of

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[447] Elsa Barkley Brown, 'Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere: African American Political Life in the Transition from Slavery to Freedom,' *Public Culture* 7, 1 (Fall 1994): 110.

[448] According to MacKinnon, consciousness-raising (with its focus on feelings, attitudes, and its 'individualistic' perspective) has actually became the "major technique of analysis, structure of organization, method of practice, and theory of social change of the women's movement." Catharine A. MacKinnon, 'Feminism, Marxism, Method and the State,' *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 7, no. 3 (1982): 519. I appropriate this concept for my general analysis of counter-public spheres and their political role. This goes in line with Negt and Kluge's focus on capitalism's overlooked 'subjective factor,' and on the centrality of self-experience for their theory.

[449] See T.V. Reed, *The Art of Protest: Culture and activism from the civil rights movement to the streets of Seattle*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), or Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, Chapter 2: 'Inclusive Political Communication.' See also Jörg Schaub, 'Aesthetic freedom and democratic ethical life: A Hegelian account of the relationship between aesthetics and democratic politics,' *European Journal of Philosophy* 27, (2019), for an account of the aesthetic dimension of consciousness-raising groups.

those groups performed "a poetic leap of the imagination forcing new insights into the roles women and men play."[450] Note that this should not imply that there is an impossibility to communicate *between* publics, or that we must give up on 'rationality' *per se,* something to which I come back later, and that is central to Negt and Kluge's conceptualization of progressive counter-publics.[451] It does put into question, however, the legitimacy of the model of the bourgeois public sphere, based on an argumentative, formal rationality, that has no place for more 'aesthetic' forms of expression nor for the discussion of 'feelings' or personal experiences.[452] In short, this should call for a *broader* understanding of 'rationality,' one where the aesthetic complements the discursive dimension.

As mentioned in Chapter IV, Habermas later became more sensitive toward the way that the aesthetic can transcend the limits of language, and in so doing help people navigate between moral, cognitive, and political dimensions. He also became more open to the validity of rhetorical, performative, and aesthetic modes of expression. As I briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, Habermas has since spoken of the illuminating power of the aesthetic experience, and even recognized that what is experienced through art cannot (always) be 'translated' into the 'argumentative' structure of communicative action. Moreover, he also came to recognize that this 'world-disclosing' power of the aesthetic has a use in political discussion. Even when he warns, for example, that rhetoric is Janus-faced, he can now assign it a political role, since it can create new vocabularies. We should not dismiss,

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450 Cellestine Ware, *Women power: The movement for women's liberation*, (New York: Tower, 1970), 113. Cited in Schaub, 'Aesthetic freedom and democratic ethical life,' 90.

451 See, e.g., PSE, 48-49.

452 See, e.g. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 118. See also Negt and Kluge's discussion on 'language barriers' in PSE, 45-49.

Habermas contends, "the positive, eye-opening effects of surprising interpretations."[453] In this vein, he also writes that:

> Rhetorical and for the most part non-discursive modes of expression such as story-telling and images, facial and bodily expressions in general, testimonies, appeals, and the like are in any case normal parts of political communication," and these clearly have no "procedural constrains.[454]

Even Habermas has gone a long way in problematizing the 'argumentative' dimension of his early model of the bourgeois public sphere. In line with Negt and Kluge, a strictly 'procedural' and 'argumentative' rationality is thereby exposed as an insufficient (and potentially ideological) means for political discussion.[455]

II.2 Impartiality, Neutrality, Consensus

Underlying Habermas' model of the bourgeois public sphere is also a notion of universalism—predicated on impartiality, neutrality, abstraction from particular points of view and contexts of living—that Negt and Kluge (alongside many other Marxist and Feminist commentators) have criticized. (PSE, xlvi; 3-4) The 'universalism' underlying the model of the bourgeois public sphere, as mentioned above, is supposed to allow for no restriction of what can be discussed, and for a public

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[453] Jürgen Habermas, 'Political Communication in Media Society: Does Democracy still have an Epistemic Dimension? The Impact of Normative Theory on Empirical Research,' in *Europe. The Faltering Project*, trans. Ciaran Cronin, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 149.

[454] Habermas, 'Political Communication in Media Society,' 154.

[455] See also Bohman, 'World Disclosure and Radical Criticism,' or Axel Honneth, 'The Possibility of a Disclosing Critique of Society: The *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in Light of Current Debates in Social Criticism,' *Constellations*, vol. 7, no. 1, (2000).

communication which should be reflective and inclusive: everyone can be a potential member of the public sphere. With this, as Bohman puts it, 'the "universe of discourse" becomes larger with the size of the discourse community and with the enlargement of the interpretive perspectives of its members.'[456] For Habermas, this implies that, however exclusionary the actually-existing bourgeois public sphere was, exclusion is not constitutive of it as a normative model. Hence why he insists that this sphere is a model that carries the potential for the constant expansion and transformation.[457]

Regardless of its virtues, however, for critics like Negt and Kluge, even this conception of universality remains problematic. This is because it relies on a concept of abstraction which, as James Bohman has noted, refers to a "capacity for impartiality and neutrality" and the adoption of a "moral point of view."[458] According to Habermas, such principles are necessary in order to resolve potential conflicts. But Negt and Kluge, in line with other commentators, would argue that this remains problematic and would reject their viability and their 'rationality.'

Crucially, Negt and Kluge's critique differs from an argument deployed, most notably, by feminism—according to which the neutral and impartial perspective, presumed by Habermas as superior, tends to discount women's judgements and perspectives.[459] In this case, Habermas could contend that, even if this were to be the case, this would amount to a failure to achieve *real* neutrality and impartiality, and not of one intrinsic to the norm itself. For Negt and Kluge, however, the appeal

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[456] James Bohman, *Public Deliberation. Pluralism, Complexity, and Democracy*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 87.

[457] See, e.g., Jodi Dean, 'Civil Society: Beyond the Public Sphere,' in *The Handbook of Critical Theory*, ed. David M. Rasmussen, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 227.

[458] Bohman, *Public Deliberation*, 88.

[459] This argument—whose details I will not discuss here—has been structured by appealing to the work of Carol Gilligan. According to her, the 'third-person,' detached observer perspective is not really "neutral," as Habermas would contend. See, e.g., Jodi Dean, 'Discourse in Different Voices,' in *Feminists Read Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse*, Johanna Meehan (ed.), (New York: Routledge, 1995), 207.

to 'neutrality' *is* itself problematic, since it implies an exclusion of "substantive life interests" which makes it impossible to understand the particularities of the life contexts of, e.g. women, religious minorities, illegal immigrants, or even the working class. As Negt and Kluge put it, the real, living structures of experience as well as many other modes of social interaction are "concealed by the reified abstractions of the valorization structure [of a bourgeois-capitalist society] and thereby prevented from fully unfolding." (PSE, 21)[460] The bourgeois public sphere, they state emphatically, "is not sufficiently grounded in substantive life interests." (PSE, xlvi)

The problem can be further adumbrated by reference to Bohman's critique of Habermas' notion of rational consensus—one that the neutral standpoint is supposed to achieve. If we strive for a consensus built on the 'bracketing off' of the particularity of points of view—something that allows Habermas to demand that consensus be based on "identical reasons"—then, Bohman writes, "many concerns that for minorities should count as public cannot be deliberated in public."[461] Habermas' model, that is, potentially hides the fact that modern capitalist societies are cut across by class, race, gender, sexual orientation, as well as by cultural and religious differences. Assuming that consensus should be the standard for what counts as a rational, public, and as a common interest, is an assumption that not only puts too high a burden on real democratic processes. Holding it within a capitalist society is also potentially legitimizing for a social order that reproduces oppression, injustice, and inequality.[462]

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[460] Further, this value abstraction, according to Negt and Kluge, facilitates the alliance between bourgeois society and the logic of capitalism, thus helping reproduce the oppressive structures of the latter. (PSE, 4; 44; 88)

[461] Bohman, *Public Deliberation*, 88. According to Bohman, "[n]ot only is this sameness of convictions required for the rationality of the deliberative process and the consensus it produces; it also must be presupposed by all deliberators who belong to the same public sphere."

[462] As with other problems with his early model, Habermas later modified his position. See for example Jürgen Habermas, 'A Reply to my Critics,' in *Habermas Critical Debates*, John B. Thompson and David Held (eds.), (London:

Negt and Kluge do not deny that certain issues are (or at least can become) of common interest. Their critique does show, however, that even in this case, adopting a neutral standpoint is not the way to bring those to the fore. According to them, the assumption of neutrality would make it difficult (if not impossible) for many social issues to be presented in public. Hence why they reject an "abstract principle of generality" that, as they argue, can become a cover for the reduction of particular and marginalized interests.[463] An example would be the current struggle for equal human rights, which has been articulated under the banner of 'Black Lives Matter.' Here, the necessity of the perspective of the particular is necessary in order to expose a common problem: the failure to have equal human rights. The practice of *testimonios* by resistance movements in Central and South America, to give another example, involves expressing the particularity of (ethnic, geographical) experience in order to expose state oppression. In this case, we see how both narrative or aesthetic devices as well as the expression of particularity are used as "a means of challenging the idea that law expresses an impartial and neutral standpoint above all particular perspectives."[464]

II.3 Inclusivity and Singularity

Finally, Negt and Kluge problematize the universalism behind the principle of inclusivity of the bourgeois public sphere. Once again, I do not want to claim that this principle is *in itself* problematic.

Macmillan, 1982), 255: "On the contrary, if the actors do not bring with them, and into their discourse, *their* individual life-histories, *their* identities, *their* needs and wants, *their* traditions, memberships, and so forth, practical discourse would be at once robbed of all content." Whether this acknowledgement of diversity actually coheres with his theory of communicative action, his account of rational and public deliberation, and his separation between ethical and moral problems (problems of the good life against problems of justice) goes beyond the scope of this thesis.

[463] See Hansen, 'Foreword,' xxvii.

[464] Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 71.

Rather, Negt and Kluge's worry lies with what happens when starting from an abstract principle and then moving 'downwards,' as it were, trying to apply it regardless of the social-historical conditions. The problem arises, e.g. in the case of capitalism, when trying to base a public sphere on a principle of inclusivity when the social structures are already marginalizing, exclusory, and oppressive. Our starting point, that is, is a society permeated by conflicting perspectives and values, power imbalances, material and symbolic disadvantages. And for many groups that have been historically marginalized or excluded from the public sphere and that have had no say in the structuring of society, it is hard to see how being 'included' in a public sphere guided by pre-set principles (set by a majority with usually opposed interests) would help them meet their demands or satisfy their needs.

In this vein, Negt and Kluge refer to the issue of class and the organization of production, and argue that, even while 'participating' in the public sphere, a 'worker' would be able to (at best) achieve labour reforms, but not in any substantive sense to use the public sphere in order to organize interests and experiences. (PSE, 7) This is not only because being included in the already-existing bourgeois public sphere presupposes playing a game where what is 'publicly' relevant is already decided, but also because the standards of what and how can something be said, of what changes are allowed, are decided in advance.[465] As Negt and Kluge write:

> Precisely because the important decisions regarding the horizon and the precise definitions of the organisation of experience have been made in advance, it is possible to exert control in a purely technical manner. (PSE, 4)[466]

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[465] Women for example, Dean notes "have had to conform to a set of standards and expectations they did not establish." (Dean, 'Civil Society: Beyond the Public Sphere,' 227)

[466] In this vein, see also PSE, 3-4: "The interdependent relationship between that which is private and the public sphere also applies to the way in which language, modes of social intercourse, and the public context come into

Given the structural inequality, diversity, the existing power-relations, not to mention the fact that the way people experience reality (e.g. what is changeable and what is not) is also structured by the logic of capitalist accumulation, the universalism of the principle of inclusion turns out to also be at odds with the pluralism of forms of life prevalent in capitalist societies.[467] This is why, as we will see, for Negt and Kluge a plurality of co-existing counter-publics seems better suited to address those issues and imbalances, and to give a voice to minorities and oppressed groups.

Another substantial problem here is what Bohman calls Habermas' "assumption of singularity." As the former writes, what allows Habermas to retain the superiority of a singular public sphere is the contention that, in matters of 'public reasons,' citizens must "converge, in the long run, on the same reasons, rather than agree for different reasons."[468] But many times the role of counter-publics conflicts with this. First, because there might be issues that simply cannot be consensually decided and are still of public interest, but second, because groups might have different reasons and interests for which they might want the same change. Even if different constituencies might agree with the goal, thus, they might do so for a diversity of reasons and motives. In this case, a plurality of counter-publics will better promote the clarification and the articulation of those needs.[469] For Negt and Kluge, the needs and interests of all of the marginalized and oppressed groups are therefore be

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being socially and publicly."

[467] While it is an open question whether *all* social forms are necessarily agonistic and conflict is inevitable, for Negt and Kluge it is certainly the case that within a capitalist society, the universalist position adopted by Habermas (which derives in the principle of inclusion and the notion of consensus) is problematic and can become ideological. Negt and Kluge's position thus approaches the 'agonism' of Chantal Mouffe. See e.g. Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, (London: Verso, 2000). However, in contrast to Mouffe, for Negt and Kluge, there is at least one common interest—abolishing capitalism—that could lead to social solidarity and cooperation, as we will see in Chapter VI.

[468] Bohman, *Public Deliberation*, 89.

[469] This is also the argument that Fraser makes against Habermas' early model. See Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere,' 66.

better represented by counter-publics, where members can express (through different means) their specific interests, something that would promote the articulation of material needs and the elucidation of issues that would not be otherwise disclosed (as with the requirement to follow abstract rules or behave 'neutrally.')[470]

Negt and Kluge do not deny the need for a more comprehensive arena where different publics can interact and communicate. This more encompassing public sphere where "everything that is actually or ostensibly relevant for all members of society is integrated," however, is a matter for the future—for a society where social production is organized rationally and autonomously. (PSE, 2) More importantly, even this future public sphere would have to be built by respecting difference and particularity, and, thus, needs to be built upon on the existence of material and cultural differences. The problem with the bourgeois public sphere, in this regard, is not the 'universality' itself. Instead, it is an abstract notion of universality that tramples over particularity and which, according to Negt and Kluge (who here align with Adorno), is closer to the violence of abstraction performed by the commodification of society and identity thinking, than to democracy.[471]

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Habermas' model, as developed in *Structural Transformation*, does not work for pluralist societies, nor for one pervaded by class divisions, and racial, gender, and sexual inequalities. And according to what I have been arguing, within capitalism these divisions are not only existing—they are structural features

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[470] See Hansen, 'Foreword,' xxx. This point intersects with that raised by Fraser in her critique of Habermas regarding participatory parity vis-à-vis the singularity of the bourgeois public sphere. See Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere,' 66: "in stratified societies, arrangements that accommodate contestation among a plurality of competing publics better promote the ideal of participatory parity than does a single, comprehensive, overarching public."

[471] See, e.g., PSE, xlvii; 4. Compare to e.g. ND, 23 or 88: "All qualitative moments whose totality might be something like a structure are flattened in the universal barter relationship."

of a system based on the appropriation of labour, capacities, and needs. It transpires that the model of the bourgeois public sphere, as an ideal type, cannot accurately describe the conditions of a pluralist society and is so detached from the real conditions that it can neither be deployed as a normative standard. Despite its ideal of universality, the 'bourgeois' public sphere undermines the 'rationality' of many aesthetic, narrative, and expressive discourses, and eclipses the legitimacy of a variety of (feminist, black, labour) counter-publics that coexist alongside the official and hegemonic public spheres. This was something that Negt and Kluge tried to correct by developing an alternative model, inspired by the increasing prominence of counter-publicity that they had experienced in the late 1960s and early 1970s. But what exactly are the political role and democratic contribution of counter-publics, with their particular forms of organization, ways of articulating their interests, and their forms of expression?

As I argue in what follows, counter-publics have a central role to play in Negt and Kluge's account of the possible constitution of a global, collective, and rational public, and by implication, in the possibility of achieving a radical social change. For them, the particularity of concrete needs and interests serves as a better springboard for collective action than the (impossible) attempt to adopt a value-free perspective. But how can particular values, needs and interests allow individuals to see that, despite their differences, there are deep structural issues that accrue all of the oppressed? How can a struggle for the recognition of a particular identity lead one to the awareness that political and economic systems can be steered democratically and thus be self-posited? And is this even possible? Can an institutional framework be democratic, plural, and also tackle inequality and oppression? In order to answer these questions, I now turn toward Negt and Kluge's account of counter-public spheres.

III) Negt and Kluge and the Role of Counter-Public Spheres

For Negt and Kluge, what is at stake when developing the category of counter-public spheres, as Hansen writes, is

> whether and to what extent [the] public sphere is organised from above – by the exclusive standards of high culture or the stereotypes of commodity culture – or by the experiencing subjects themselves.[472]

Because counter-publics allow for more (if not complete) organization from below, according to Negt and Kluge, these function more adequately than the bourgeois public sphere. Contrary to the static identity of the abstract and value-neutral citizen of the bourgeois public sphere, within counter-publics individuals have developed new ways of experience, new identities, new ways of relating to the world and others, and have developed means to express and articulate their claims and needs that are not limited by any heteronomous logic. Within counter-publics, that is, people have been able to organize collectively (to a lesser or greater extent) their own particular experiences.

Fraser recalls, to give an example, how women formed feminist counter-publics and thus were able to develop their own means of expression through the use of a

> variegated array of journals, bookstores, publishing companies, film and video distribution networks, lecture series, research centers, academic programs, conferences, conventions, festivals, and local meeting places.[473]

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[472] Hansen, 'Reinventing the Nickelodeon,' 392.

[473] Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere,' 67.

Armed with the aid of these media, through the appropriation of literature, or by using narrative or poetic modes of expression,[474] women were (and still are) able to articulate their experiences and conceptualize violations of their rights by inventing terms like "marital rape" or "sexual harassment." By forming counter-public(s), Fraser continues, women managed to "recast [their] needs and identities."[475]

Maria Pia Lara, in her book *Moral Textures*, similarly highlights how feminists were able to gain strength and publicity by means of the symbolic-cultural dimension. She mentions how, e.g., many African-American women could reappropriate their religious legacy and give it a "new voice," or how Latin American women used the life of the Mexican painter Frida Kahlo "as a means of connecting past experiences to a new model of self-fashioning."[476] According to Lara, by narrating their lives, women were able to give an account of their own lives, and thus gained (some) autonomy—achieved when "one can determine one's life and when one's ethical project finds recognition."[477]

For Negt and Kluge, I argue in what follows, the central political role of counter-public spheres is to act as sites where needs and interests can be brought to consciousness, thereby fostering autonomous and critical thought—something that the aforementioned examples illustrate.[478] And while this achievement should not be confused with the material realization of subjects' needs, nor

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[474] See, e.g., Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 70-76 or Jean L. Cohen, 'Critical Social Theory and Feminist Critiques: The Debate with Jürgen Habermas,' in *Feminists Read Habermas*, 76-80.

[475] Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere,' 67.

[476] Maria Pia Lara, *Moral Textures. Feminist Narratives in the Public Sphere*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 49; 91.

[477] Lara, *Moral Textures*, 91. Below, I question the extent to which subjects (any member of a counter-public) can become truly 'autonomous' by belonging to a counter-public but without more substantial structural changes. See III.2 in this Chapter.

[478] Importantly, the above examples also show the role of aesthetic means in reconfiguring subjects' values, beliefs, and self-conceptions.

with the transformation of the *social* production of experience, for Negt and Kluge the role of counter-publics is still necessary if individuals are to eventually have it in their hands to achieve a fully rational society—one, that is, where there is a non-violent synthesis of particulars and where the demands for justice do not clash with the demands for individual self-realization. Counter-publics, to use Lara's words, can lead to an (eventual) "struggle of recognition *and* transformation."[479] After analysing this 'consciousness-raising' function, I touch upon some of the limits of counter-publicity.

III.1 The Consciousness-Raising Role of Counter-Publics

I contend that the central characteristic of counter-publics is that they allow individuals to express and articulate, *in their own terms,* their needs and interests (not always using discursive/linguistic means) that would otherwise remain invisible, excluded from the public sphere. I therefore take it that Negt and Kluge's understanding of counter-public spheres approaches something like Fraser's influential definition. For Fraser, counter-public spheres are:

> parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs.[480]

From this perspective, counter-public spheres can be understood as sites where new interpretations and experiences of the social reality can emerge collectively, insofar as the impositions and pressures of the hegemonic social context can be relaxed—which, let me emphasise, does not mean that those are completely blocked.

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[479] Lara, *Moral Textures,* 7.

[480] Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere,' 67.

Within counter-publics, that is, it is not the particular needs, interests, and status of individuals that are 'bracketed off,' but the expectations society has of each different group. This is what has made it possible for counter-publics to reformulate their identities, question stereotypical and discriminatory tags addressed to them, and thus formulate, in their own terms, their needs and interests. Once the social norms—that are ossified into second nature—are (however contextually) transgressed, or seen-through, individuals can begin to see themselves differently, and to develop a critical perspective vis-à-vis their society. In counter-public spheres, unarticulated experiences (what Negt and Kluge call their obstinacy or protest energy) are 'oriented' toward forms of critical awareness. It is this, as we will see, which can eventually lead individuals to perceive the whole of society differently and critically since here the pressure of the reality principle is momentarily "put out of action," allowing people to communicate and interact uninhibitedly. (PSE, 247)[481] As Negt and Kluge write, within a counter-public sphere

> this compact reality [experienced as a permanent censorship of their individual behavior and thinking and] which in normal life fences them in and keeps them under control, is so far removed from their field of vision that they are able to bring contents of their own experience into the form of communication and relationships between human beings. (PSE, 247-248)

That Negt and Kluge focus on the 'consciousness raising' role as a central political need is related to their understanding of the 'rationality' of existing social structures, institutions, and of the current form of organization of production. According to them, these cannot be deemed 'rational'

[481] It is important to note, however, that for Negt and Kluge this does not (yet) amount to a radical social transformation, something that would require a transformation of the social structures that make counter-publics necessary in the first place. How this is possible will be discussed in Chapter VI.

insofar as they do not allow for the self-determination of social norms and practices nor for the autonomous development of capacities. But what is more, this actually makes individuals alienated, since—separated from their capacities and their own experience—they can only experience reality (a reality that eludes their comprehension) as a "mystificatory context of commodity fetishism," as they put it following Adorno. (PSE, 6) In line with Adorno's diagnosis of modern capitalism, then, Negt and Kluge contend that a pre-condition for an emancipatory praxis would be recovering that awareness and consciousness, whose development the capitalist structures foreclose.[482]

Contrary to Adorno, however—and hence the centrality of the Habermasian category of the public sphere—a fundamental aspect to raise awareness lies in the *collective* dimension of experience. This dimension is fundamental because, according to them, as Adorno was well aware, an individual socialized under capitalism (and therefore reified) cannot simply recognize his or her own 'lack of experience' or alienation by itself—this awareness is precisely what alienation forecloses. To do so, the moment of 'social experience' is central. When confronting the 'other' in public, one can encounter, through him or her, its own suffering or alienation in a refracted form. In that moment, the 'other' stops being one, and becomes someone who—because of certain common traits, conditions, or social position—shares the social suffering or alienation. (PSE, 7-8) In that moment, the suffering stops being personal and becomes social, collective.

In this vein, we should note that the collective or public reception of mass culture is but another reason why Negt and Kluge defend 'mass' or 'popular' culture as opposed to autonomous forms of art. An aesthetic experience, that is, can trigger a process where fantasy and capacities that

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[482] Note that this is one of the reasons why Negt and Kluge emphasize that obstinacy, an emancipatory potential, cannot be actualized if it remains something *felt* rather than understood, and why they speak of fantasy as an *unconscious* critique of alienation which first needs to be organized.

are otherwise repressed can begin to unfold. But for Negt and Kluge, the collective or public sharing of the aesthetic experiences plays a crucial role in pushing that unfolding forward. Sharing the experiences in public (making them intersubjective) facilitates the consciousness-raising process, and in so doing "[produces] new orderings of experience," as Bray calls them.[483] When art and culture are collectively appropriated, these experiences can be shared, they can begin to be articulated, and it is this process which transforms a set of individuals into a public. Through *collective* interaction, new experiences, new ways of understanding, and new critical insights begin to emerge, *building* bonds of solidarity as well as common interests and needs.

Counter-publics will not be able to transform, in themselves, the oppressive structures of society. But they can begin to liberate the conditions for a full experience [*Erfahrung*], i.e. "the capacities of having and reflecting upon experience, of seeing connections and relations, of juggling reality and fantasy, of remembering the past and imagining a different future."[484] In so doing, counter-publics mediate between individual perceptions and a shared experience of alienation, making it possible for subjects to become aware, *not only* of the fact that they are alienated, but also of the fact that this alienation has a social dimension.

For Negt and Kluge, this role cannot simply be sidestepped since, for them, a truly radical and *rational* social change will have to be achieved through the conscious and autonomous engagement of the subjects. Trying to deliberate about what are the best conditions for a democratic debate presupposes that the autonomy of thought necessary for a true democracy already exist. But given that the current social organization of production and the horizon of experience are determined

[483] Bray, 'Openness as a Form of Closure,' 150.

[484] Hansen, 'Foreword,' xvii.

heteronomously, for Negt and Kluge this would be like putting the cart before the horse. This is why, first, we need to trigger processes of consciousness-formation that can generate autonomous subjects.

III.2 The Risks and Limits of Counter-Public Spheres

The theory of counter-public spheres, as developed by Negt and Kluge, is advantageous when trying to understand the conditions of modern capitalist societies—permeated by pluralism and conflict—as well as for understanding the possibilities for a social transformation. Nevertheless, counter-public spheres (as well as the theories that try to conceptualize them) run the risk of blocking the path toward such a transformation, and need to be approached critically. In what follows, I want to address some of these issues, and discuss Negt and Kluge's approach to them.

First, one could worry that counter-publics might take themselves to be already emancipated, i.e., that these confuse the *awareness* of alienation with the *elimination* of alienation, with the self-determination of one's own experience [*Erfahrung*]. In this case, counter-publics might either fall short of achieving their emancipatory potential, or they might further separatism, instead of solidarity, thereby reproducing the problematic mechanisms of the bourgeois public sphere. This usually happens when counter-publics become focused on achieving authenticity or when their discourse is dependent on identity-based claims.

The second problem regards the extent to which these publics can achieve a radical social change. Here, the worry (expressed by socialists, communitarians, or some forms of Marxism, but which could also be associated with Habermas' communicative theory of democracy) is that counter-publicity might lead to a division of forces, or push the concerns with social production and material inequality out of sight. This would divert attention away from the common good or from structural oppression. The worry, that is, is that by focusing on what has been called an 'identity politics' or only

on the cultural dimension, counter-publics might disregard the 'true' transformative goal, or place its political energies elsewhere.

As I argue, these problems are pressing, and many counter-publics (as well as theories about them) have fallen prey to them. However, with Negt and Kluge, this does not mean that counter-publicity is *in itself* problematic, and that we should therefore dismiss a theory which tries to salvage particularity.

The first problem—the assumption of autonomy—can be traced to the belief that, by participating in a counter-public sphere, a subject will be already emancipated, or recover its autonomy in full. For Negt and Kluge, who trace oppression back to the logic of capitalist societies, the individuals within counter-publics cannot be taken to be already emancipated. As long as capitalism is the underlying social structure, individuals will still be determined, *qua* subjects, by structures and processes that are not functioning rationally or democratically. It is thus mistaken to think of the identities constructed within counter-publics as self-posited or as 'authentic,' or of its members as autonomous, Negt and Kluge would argue. To believe that one can construct one's own subjectivity autonomously from *within* a public sphere—through means like aesthetic appropriation, or through the narrative construction of one's identity—is to occlude that those materials through which groups and individuals can reassert their 'identities' are also part of the hegemonic culture.

In this vein, Stuart Hall rightly argues that cultural forms—both oppositional and hegemonic—are not coherent and whole, even when we tend to think of them as "either wholly corrupt or wholly authentic."[485] Rather, these are always already constructed through the *relation* between 'inside' and 'outside,' between hegemonic and counter-public. Identities need to be

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[485] Hall, 'Notes on Deconstructing the Popular,' 233.

understood as constructed through their relations and social positions; and insofar as the logic of capitalism is the overarching social logic, there will be psychic, material, or symbolic blocks that penetrate even the most isolated or separatist counter-culture. Resistance, that is, is not the same as autonomy.

An extreme example is the retreat into hippie communes, a movement which flourished during the 1960s in the attempt to run away from a corrupt culture and "create [one's] own," as writes Robert Houriet, who visited many of these communes during that decade.[486] As he accounts, these movements were trying to start from zero, starting their own lives away from the grips of capitalism—including its understanding of time and history:

> Somewhere in the line of history, civilization had made a wrong turn, a detour that had led into a cul-de-sac. The only way, they felt, was to drop out and go all the way back to the beginning, to the primal source of consciousness, the true basis of culture: the land.[487]

Eventually, however, as Jenny Odell recounts in her book *How to Do Nothing*, these radical experiments failed, and their members were confronted by the fact that there was no return to authentic life, no self-positing of their own lives.[488] What their failure teaches us is that there is no realm outside the logic of capitalism from which autonomy can be derived, and therefore, that no domain of *oppositional* culture can be considered (wholly) authentic or self-determined. Note that the notion of counter-publicity itself presupposes the relation between hegemonic and subordinated groups (PSE, 60).[489] Even within counter-publics, as Negt and Kluge contend, the value abstraction "that underlies

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[486] Robert Houriet, *Getting Back Together,* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1971), xix.

[487] Houriet, *Getting Back Together*, xiii.

[488] Jenny Odell, *How to Do Nothing*, (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2019), 39-40.

[489] In this context, see Mouffe's criticism of Habermas' consensus politics in *The Democratic Paradox*, 48.

commodity production" organizes (even if perhaps to a lesser extent) people's perception and their experience. (PSE, 4)

More interesting are the examples of feminism or of the Black liberation movement. In these cases, problems emerge when trying to define group-belonging by reference to an 'authentic' identity, or through the definition of essential attributes such as 'femininity' or 'blackness.' However, as Sandra Bartky notes regarding women's oppression, these appeals are misguided:

> women *qua* women are not now in possession of an alternate culture, a "native" culture which, even if regarded by everyone, including ourselves, as decidedly inferior to the dominant culture, we could at least recognize as our own. However degraded or distorted an image of ourselves we see reflected in the patriarchal culture, the culture of our men is still our culture.[490]

As Iris Marion Young has relatedly noted, in attempting to define an authentic identity or some essential attributes which determine who belongs to a counter-public, there will unavoidably be some subjects whose *experience* of oppression is shared by the members of the group, but which fail to possess the necessary characteristics.[491]

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[490] Sandra Bartky, 'On Psychological Oppression,' in *Femininity and Domination. Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*, (London: Routledge, 1990), 25.

[491] Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 88. The polemic between J.K. Rowling and transgender and feminist activists illustrates this. The author of the *Harry Potter* series has recently been strongly criticized after public statements where she disregards the experience of Black and transgender women. Arguably, her perspective (as a white, middle-aged woman) does not allow her to see these individuals as women. See, e.g., Aja Romano, 'Harry Potter and the Author Who Failed Us,' *Vox*, June 11, 2020. https://www.vox.com/culture/21285396/jk-rowling-transphobic-backlash-harry-potter

Defining counter-publics in terms of a common identity seems to imply that "all [members] have the same interests and agree on the values, strategies, and policies that will promote those interests," Young notes.[492] This assumption would occlude divisions or differences within the groups, thus reproducing the exclusion of the 'bourgeois' public sphere, since other differences will tend to be 'suspended,' if not necessarily hidden or ignored. This is something Rita Felski has also addressed in her account of the feminist public sphere, and relates to the fact that counter-publics are usually organized "in terms of a common identity."[493] A women's public sphere, for example, could be focused on highlighting gender-based oppression, making gender the mediating element supposed to bring women together. As Felski has highlighted, this can be an asset, since it allows people to find common ground vis-à-vis a certain shared experience of oppression.[494] However, it can also lead to a blindness vis-à-vis different 'faces' of oppression.

Sharing the above worries, Negt and Kluge warn against a self-understanding of counter-publics reached through abstract oppositions to the 'other,' something that only reproduces the (exclusionary) forms of the bourgeois context of living. (PSE, 62-63)[495] In this case, the danger is that the multiplicity of experiences and perspectives within the group will be reduced to one that is

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[492] Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 88.

[493] Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*, 166.

[494] As Felski notes, this is actually one of the things that have made feminist novels such a good vehicle for the formation of feminist counter-publics: "the feminist novel focuses upon areas of personal experience which women are perceived to share in common beyond their cultural, political, and class differences." (Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics,* 167.)

[495] See, e.g., the discussion of feminism in Reni Eddo-Lodge's *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People about Race*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2018). See also the critique of liberal feminism by Nancy Fraser et al. in *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto*, (London: Verso, 2019).

considered the standard, thus "marginalizing or silencing that of others."[496] Felski's conclusion is in line with Negt and Kluge's position, and also touches upon problems mentioned above:

> it has become apparent that female community cannot simply transcend existing power structures but is deeply implicated within them, and that the exclusive focus upon gender politics can serve to obscure other, equally fundamental structural inequalities within late capitalism.[497]

This points to a second substantial danger with counter-publics—one related to the link between the cultural and the political-economic dimension (or in Marxist terms, between base and superstructure)—which I call, following Jean Cohen, their 'limited radicalism.'[498] To understand Negt and Kluge's position, let me note that their notion of 'production' is already intended to problematize this division—hence why they would also want to understand 'culture' as a product of human activity.[499] However, they also insist, as already mentioned, that only a new organization of production will allow individuals to produce their own experiences and construct an autonomous public sphere.

Many counter-publics emerge through the appropriation or production of cultural material and (perhaps given the opacity of the economic and political systems) initially target issues of self-realization, socialization, and identity formation.[500] What the 'aesthetic' or cultural dimensions allow

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[496] Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 89.

[497] Felski, Beyond Feminist Aesthetics, 169.

[498] I take this formulation from Jean Cohen, who used it in her critique of Habermas' account of new social movements. See Cohen, 'Critical Social Theory and Feminist Critiques.'

[499] Negt and Kluge's notion of production was mentioned in Chapter II and will be discussed in detail in Chapter VI, I.2.

[500] See e.g. Jürgen Habermas, 'New Social Movements,' *Telos* 49 (1981): 33: "the new conflicts are not sparked by *problems of distribution*, but concern the *grammar of forms of life*." See also, e.g., Honneth, 'Organized Self-Realization,' 469-470, who mentions also the so-called 'sexual revolution' of the Post-War era.

for is a reformulation of their senses-of-self and of their social position inside the lifeworld, and thus, it could be said that even when these publics are oriented *outward*—in the formulation of their needs as political demands, they are ultimately demanding a public response—these tend to be demands for recognition, and not for redistribution, to use Fraser's important distinction.[501] But following from the above, we can argue, with Negt and Kluge, that gaining cultural 'recognition' within the present social order is not the same as gaining the possibility to self-determine the social horizon of experience. More importantly, focusing on the struggle for recognition could and many times has occluded the necessity of a broader structural (i.e. political and economic) change.

Let me go back to the case of feminism, where, as Nancy Fraser rightly asserts, the critique of practices like sexual harassment, or inequality of pay, has become widely disseminated and culturally accepted in Western democracies.[502] To argue that, e.g., women deserve to be paid less, would, in these times, be unacceptable. And yet, those *practices* are still more than present. "The vast change in *mentalitès* has not (yet) translated into structural, institutional change."[503] What is more, according to Fraser, the cultural changes achieved by feminism have actually allowed capitalist societies to gain new legitimacy. Whether this is truly the case is not as important as noting that, indeed, cultural recognition and its critique have not gone deep enough. Without structural changes that transform, for example, family relations, the division between what counts as productive and unproductive labour, and even the capitalist relations of production (that also reproduce inequality through the vector of gender) women's identities will remain heteronomously defined, and systemic oppression will remain in place.

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501 See e.g. Nancy Fraser, 'From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Post-Socialist' Age,' *New Left Review* I/212, (July - August 1995) for an account of the debate between the struggles for (cultural) recognition and (material) redistribution.

502 Nancy Fraser, 'Feminism, Capitalism, and the Cunning of History,' *New Left Review* 56, (March – April 2009): 98.

503 Fraser, 'Feminism, Capitalism, and the Cunning of History,' 99.

In spite of these worries, Negt and Kluge insist on the centrality of cultural struggle, where needs and interests *can* be organized—even if not yet autonomously constructed or materially satisfied on a social scale. (PSE, 262) Thus, even when a change of consciousness and the self-clarification brought about within counter-publics is not (yet) enough to radically transform society, nor can this be taken as the final step in a struggle against oppression and alienation, it also happens that, without this change in mentalities, social praxis cannot begin to be considered autonomous or self-determined. Furthermore, we need to consider that the 'cultural' praxis of many groups that want to assert their differences and particularities—against the exclusion or stereotyping prevalent in the hegemonic culture—performs a central role in fostering solidarity, and in giving back its members a degree of agency which capitalism (which presents itself as a closed-off totality, as 'second nature') otherwise occludes.[504]

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The production or appropriation of culture can appear to be limited when considered from the perspective of its immediate transformative effects. However, the use of aesthetic means such as music, film, journals, or autobiographies, has served to disseminate counter-ideologies that render its receivers less powerless and less passive. We need to be aware, what is more, that inside or parallel to the demands for 'recognition,' there are contained (sometimes more explicitly than others) claims against oppression, discrimination, and thus for justice and equality—it just happens that the equality these groups call for is not one that levels off substance and difference.[505]

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[504] See Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 103.

[505] As has been noted by promoters of 'difference,' Feminist and Black struggles promote the cultivation of their identity not in spite but in order to achieve material and economic equality. See e.g. Iris Marion Young, 'Unruly Categories: A Critique of Nancy Fraser's Dual Systems Theory,' *New Left Review* no. 222 (March 1997): 148-149.

Negt and Kluge's work allows us to see that what is at stake in the formation of counter-public spheres is the possibility for people to constitute new (non-controlling) social relations, new ways of understanding themselves and others—and to do this from below, i.e. as derived from their own experiences of oppression and exclusion. (PSE, 27) This is why, for them, counter-public spheres cannot be dismissed or sidestepped, merely replaced with, e.g., political parties. The possibility to transform society from the roots, and to do this truly rationally, is also at stake in the counter-struggle for the public sphere. To claim that modern capitalist societies are already rational (as Habermas does, for example) is to misconstrue rationality and misses the extent to which the logic of capitalism determines people's experiences *behind* their backs, and thus hinders the development of individual autonomy. To call capitalist societies 'rational' is also to block the possibility of a more comprehensive change, one where particularity and universality no longer appear as polar opposites.

Negt and Kluge insist that to achieve this comprehensive transformation, and if counter-public spheres are to reach their full potential, they must, however, incorporate the transformation of the political-economic dimension into their aims. The cultural struggle and (re)appropriation of experience and identities should, thus, be taken as an entry point which needs to be connected with a struggle against the logic of capital—a struggle that, as we will see, also requires different social groups to interact with each other.[506] Hence why, in spite of the centrality given to culture by Negt and Kluge, the economic dimension (understood as the social organization of production) is never lost from sight.[507] For Negt and Kluge, that is, a transformation that embraces the *totality of society* requires that a

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[506] The goal, Neg and Kluge state, is to "first of all develop a new mode of production and a new way of life. This is when the actual work first begins." (PSE, 61)

[507] As Pavsek puts it, for Negt and Kluge the economic plays "an overwhelming role in the determination of human subjectivity and collective life in general, for the economic dominates the realm of social production, even if it cannot comprise its totality." Pavsek, 'Negt and Kluge's Redemption of Labor,' 151.

change in consciousness is accompanied by "a transformed organization of production." (PSE, 263) Once counter-publics realize this, and turn their efforts toward achieving this more encompassing change, we can begin to speak of an emerging 'proletarian' public sphere. The analysis of this concept is the subject of the next and final chapter.

Chapter VI: The 'Proletarian' Public Sphere

Counter-public spheres, which emerge when subjects come together to express themselves and allow them to reconfigure their experiences and identities, are central in Negt and Kluge's account of the possibility for social change. The notion points toward the importance of developing critical awareness, and toward the need to oppose the strictures in experience imposed by capitalism, which, as Hansen puts it, condition "all perceptual faculties according to an abstract rationality."[508] Counter-publicity, therefore, involves a struggle against being subsumed by the hegemonic public sphere—a struggle present in the efforts to re-define the dominant cultural and symbolic practices. By participating in counter-public spheres, individuals can begin to articulate their experiences of alienation and oppression and, in so doing, they also expose the hegemonic mechanisms of exclusion.

However, if the problem of alienation and reification, and the heteronomous determination of experience by the social structures, is as pervasive and dangerous as Negt and Kluge consider it to be, then the strategy of counter-publicity—the struggle for cultural articulation and recognition, and to expose the prevailing exclusion—could be found wanting. Negt and Kluge are aware of this and, as I have emphasized, they constantly remind us that without the material basis that can guarantee the fulfilment of needs and interests (i.e. without also changing the materiality upon which social practice is built) then the recognition of one's demands or of one's identity would remain one-sided. (HO, 236)[509] A social organization that is based on a principle of primitive accumulation, which expropriates

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[508] Miriam Hansen, "Alexander Kluge: Crossings between Film, Literature, and Critical Theory," in *Film und literatur: literarische Texte und der neue deutsche Film*, ed. Sigrid Bauschinger, Susan L. Cocalis, and Henry A. Lea (Bern: Francke, 1984), 183.

[509] See also Miller, '*Eigensinn* in Transit,' 95: "The unity of the cultural. . .and the material (by way of concreteness and protection) captures the required fullness of subjective-objective relations."

subjective capacities [*Eigenschaften*] and property [*Eigentum*], we have seen, inhibits the possibility for individuals (acting autonomously and collectively) to decide the path of their own history and personal stories. And for Negt and Kluge, that is, the current social structures are built upon such an arbitrary and oppressive principle, and therefore, does not allow the 'social producers' to realize that it is *their* creative activity that keeps reality moving. Such heteronomous determination of experience has rendered society opaque, so that people's domination and oppression is reproduced by themselves.[510]

This is why, for Negt and Kluge, if society's material basis is to change *rationally*, i.e. collectively and in a self-determined way, it is necessary to, first, expose the underlying mechanisms of the public sphere and the capitalist logic. This is what sets theory's political task: namely, contributing to people's awareness of their (dis)possession (say, *as* Black, *as* women, *as* queer) *and* the further awareness that such dispossession is originated in that fundamental—and structural—antagonism between appropriation/expropriation that cuts across capitalist societies. It is, thus, *not only* a matter of 'raising' consciousness, but of generating what we could call 'class consciousness,' a term that, nevertheless, acquires a different meaning within 'late,' pluralist capitalism. This new meaning is succinctly stated by Fredric Jameson:

> the intensification of class consciousness will be less a matter of populist or *ouvrierist* exaltation of a single class by itself, than of the forcible reopening of access to a sense of society as a totality, and the reinvention of possibilities of cognition and perception that allow social phenomena once again to become transparent, as moments of the struggle between classes.[511]

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[510] "People slip into the functional under the influence of the abstractions of capitalist production," Negt and Kluge write in reference to Brecht. (HO, 236)

[511] Fredric Jameson, 'Reflections in Conclusion,' in *Aesthetics and Politics*, (London: Verso, 1980), 212.

It is now possible to reassess both the relevance of counter-publics, and the political need to strive for something more encompassing, more transformative. The (Adornian) concern with preserving particularity, and with the need to self-develop needs and interests from concrete and material experiences, allows Negt and Kluge to argue that counter-publics play a necessary role in the development of a critical consciousness. However, given the above, Negt and Kluge are also aware that counter-publicity—as a counter-hegemonic struggle performed under the banner of a particular identity, a shared interest, a common trait—is not enough for a historical transformation of society.

For one, as we have seen, pluralism can lead to separatism, fragmentation, or to a retreat away from social reality, because in different contexts of living dispossession is often expressed differently—and thus lived and sensed differently by its subjects (potentially generating antagonisms), something that complicates achieving cooperation between different publics.[512] Relatedly, counter-publics—usually built around particular identities—can obscure and reproduce other dimensions of oppression (e.g., the focus on gender within a feminist counter-public sphere is prone to overlooks potential exclusions in terms of class or race).

More importantly, it also happens that—given the pluralism of values and ways of seeing—the object of critique might fade from view, leading to either conformism, pessimism, an abstract negation of society; or to the feeling that capitalist appropriation is either no longer the problem, or one that is unavoidable. The fact that the historical and structural dimensions of society have become so opaque that they appear as 'second nature' only complicates this. The transformative role of

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[512] For example, it might seem that the struggle of the working class is at odds with the struggle of 'identity politics'—the former will decry that focusing on issues like sexual harassment or police brutality only deviates attention from capitalist exploitation, while the latter might contend that, e.g., traditional Marxists reproduce racist or patriarchal relations and their focus on the relations of production is too narrow. For more on this particular debate see, e.g., Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 85-86.

counter-publics, *qua* counter-publics, is thus necessarily limited vis-à-vis the totality of the social structures. If the aim is a truly radical transformation of society, a struggle that focuses only in the cultural expressions of oppression, or demands recognition, without *also* questioning the deeper social structures, will not be enough.[513]

What would be needed to transcend the limitations of counter-public spheres, without losing their particularity or without dismissing the importance of self-experience? For Negt and Kluge, this would entail the construction of what they call a 'proletarian' public sphere, i.e. a public sphere where a non-violent synthesis of diverse publics can be achieved, and where, through cooperation, the material basis of society can be transformed so that human beings become the "producers of their own historical way of life in its totality," to recall Horkheimer's desideratum.[514] The political task (in which both counter-public spheres and the labour of theory and art are involved) would thence require rendering culture and the social structures transparent enough so that individuals can become aware of the contingency of oppression and alienation. It would also require that individuals become conscious that it is in their hands to organize society autonomously.

Individuals—perhaps already aware that they are alienated or oppressed—need to come to terms with the fact that they are all 'proletarians,' which is Negt and Kluge's term to speak of those whose productive activity, broadly understood, is illicitly appropriated, and whose capacities are heteronomously organized. In this sense, the 'proletarian' public sphere—which is the central and perhaps most polemical concept of Negt and Kluge's work—would be the process of constructing a

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[513] I make this distinction because, as I argue below, when a counter-public is already making its members developing a more encompassing critical consciousness, one that does indeed focus on the structural level, we would already be speaking of a 'proletarian' public sphere. See section II below for an analysis of this concept.

[514] Horkheimer, 'Postscript,' 244. See footnote 48 above.

social horizon of experience where individuals become conscious of their status as proletarians. But it would also be a social horizon where production (including the production of culture and experience) is organized from below, autonomously, and collectively, and where no interest or need goes unconsidered.

This implies that there is a double-meaning to the 'proletarian' public sphere, which can be construed as both a process where a full experience [*Erfahrung*] is progressively restored; and as the qualitatively new and emancipatory social horizon built by those now-autonomous individuals. It could thus be said, alternatively, that the 'proletarian' public sphere is both the process of liberating experience and the utopian horizon toward which that process moves. "Emancipation presupposes the acquisition of experience," Negt and Kluge write. "For people to attain this with self-assurance they require not the media but an autonomous public sphere they have themselves produced."[515]

To account for the possibility of constructing this 'proletarian' public sphere, therefore, Negt and Kluge would have to show that subjects can go beyond the resistance elicited in 'counter-publics' *and* (conscious of the shared and structural dimensions of oppression) build, collectively, the public sphere anew. What complicates these two demands, however, is that for this process to be truly rational (and thus emancipatory) subjects need to reach this awareness by going *through* their own particular experiences, without thereby losing the particularity of interests and needs. Only if Negt and Kluge show that this is achievable, would they be able to justify the claim regarding the real possibility of (rationally and collectively) constructing a qualitatively new social horizon of experience.

In this chapter, I explore Negt and Kluge's model of the 'proletarian' public sphere, assess its viability, its strengths and weaknesses, and discuss the role that the aesthetic can play in its constitution.

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[515] Negt and Kluge, 'Introduction: On New Public Spheres,' in *Public Sphere and Experience*.

I begin by clarifying the meaning behind Negt and Kluge's (apparently anachronistic) terms 'proletarian' and 'production,' something necessary to grasp with clarity what is at stake in the constitution of the 'proletarian' public sphere. As we will see, their *sui generis* understanding of productivity and of the proletarian class is intended to highlight the value of forms of labour and production that usually go unconsidered or are unaccounted for in capitalist societies, and to expose the underlying common core that unites different social struggles (section I). In the following section, I reconstruct their model of the 'proletarian' public sphere. I argue that to make sense of the category of the 'proletarian' public sphere it needs to be conceptualized in two senses: first, as a consciousness-raising process, and second, as the result of this process, which would be a social horizon of experience that is constituted collectively and autonomously (section II). In the final section, I return to a discussion on the role that some artistic practices can have in the constitution of this 'proletarian' public sphere. Here, the distinction between a 'limited' but oppositional consciousness, and a proletarian consciousness is central. To reach the former, the appropriation of objects of the culture industry is sufficient, as we have seen. But to intervene in the emergence of a 'proletarian' consciousness, I contend with Negt and Kluge, artworks must manage to orient people's thought without blocking the self-developing of experience. To illustrate how this can be achieved, I finish with a discussion of the aesthetic practices of Kluge and a brief analysis of his film *News From Ideological Antiquity* (2008) (section III).

I) Working Class or Proletarian? Some Conceptual Clarifications

A question that has lurked behind Negt and Kluge's account of the 'proletarian' public sphere, and that could make the reader initially suspect, regards their use of the term 'proletarian.' Negt and Kluge are aware that there is a danger in using this concept, as well as its counterpart, that of the 'bourgeoise,'

since this could be taken as a sign of an 'idealization' of certain experiences or a fetishization of a particular social position. (PSE, xliii-xliv) However, they insist on their use because, for one, they want to make the reader aware that the history carried out by these concepts is one that still determines the functioning and the institutional structures of modern capitalist societies. The 'façade of legitimation' of the current hegemonic public sphere, they contend, needs to be exposed, and this requires illuminating its history of exclusions.

According to them, the bourgeois discourse of universality has allowed for the reproduction of the capitalist logic—an abstract and alienating logic that has, however, become independent of the social will and has the world in its grip. (PSE, 4) Even when the words 'bourgeois' and 'proletarian' might have become anachronistic, Negt and Kluge contend that the conditions these concepts denote are very much present. Similarly, their reference to 'social production' is intended to show that capitalist production—i.e. the production of commodities—is not the only mode of production available. Hence why they refer, instead, to the

> production of agents of socialization, of language, of the construction of the drive structure, the production of experience, of collective entities and public spheres—in other words, the production of life contexts. (PSE, 8)

The intention behind Negt and Kluge's conceptual shifts is to expose individuals as the creators of their own conditions of living, and to help the 'producers' of society gain awareness that, to end alienation and oppression, they need to produce their experiences and their history consciously and autonomously. Negt and Kluge's understanding of those concepts, on which I expand below, should also facilitate the understanding of the role that capitalism plays in their understanding of the 'proletarian' public sphere.

I.1 (Social) Production and the Logic of Capitalism

Negt and Kluge's work is based on an understanding of the functioning of capitalism that, while retaining many of the traditional Marxist concerns, cannot be mapped clearly onto these. To begin with, as mentioned, their expanded notion of production is not limited to the production of commodities, but rather refers to what they call "*social production*: that is, the production of society as a whole."[516] In *History and Obstinacy* Negt and Kluge question the idea—prevalent in capitalist societies—that the 'value' (of an object, of a service, but even of a relation) should be measured in economic terms, something that was already implied in Marx's formulation of the term 'productive labour.' (HO, 347)[517] Indeed, for Negt and Kluge, within capitalism activities like "raising children, love relationships, the work of mourning, and joy" *do not directly reproduce capital*. (HO, 347) In Marx's framework, then, these would not fit. But should this be reason to consider these socially value-less? Does the fact that these are 'unproductive' make them less relevant, less constitutive of the social whole? According to Negt and Kluge, as long as we hold on to the distinction between 'productive' and 'non-productive' labour, many activities (such as the above) which capitalism needs to reproduce itself but that do not play a direct part in the production of profit will continue to be undervalued, and their forms of labour will continue to be exploited, however 'invisibly.' In consequence, the experiences of many social constituencies will also continue to be excluded and alienated.

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516 Pavsek, 'Negt and Kluge's Redemption of Labour,' 147.

517 Marx writes: "doesn't the pianist produce music and satisfy our musical ear, does he not even to a certain extent produce the latter? He does indeed: his labour produces something; but that does not make it productive labour in the economic sense; no more than the labour of the madman who produces delusions is productive. *Labour becomes productive only by producing its own opposite*." (Karl Marx, *Grundrisse. Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, trans. Martin Nicolaus, (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 305.)

Importantly, once production is expanded to include all social activities required for the functioning of modern societies—such as the production of relationships, of modes of perception, of the 'social horizon of experience' itself—then the concept of 'labour' also changes. Negt and Kluge, thus, understand it broadly as "the human ability to change matter purposefully." (HO, 73) By focusing on labour in such a wide-ranging sense, their work highlights, first, the now overlooked relevance of labour for self-fulfilment, and importantly for what follows, second, it brings to the fore the emancipatory role of 'non-productive' types of labour.[518]

Regarding the importance of labour for self-fulfilment, Negt and Kluge argue that part of what makes capitalism problematic is that it has allowed the reified social structures to become independent from human goals, thereby hindering the autonomous development of subjective capacities.[519] But their work also highlights that capitalism's mode of production eclipses the relevance for social reproduction of forms of 'labour' that are usually considered private, unproductive, symbolic, cultural—and we should not forget the labour that goes on within the 'political economy of labour power,' as described in Chapter II.[520] Notably, these forms are not only overlooked by capitalism, but *also* in traditional Marxist discourse, which focuses on a very narrow understanding of what counts as 'productive' activity. According to their argument (which anticipates recent feminist critiques), these 'non-productive' forms of labour are as central for social reproduction as 'productive activity,' and

[518] 'The History of Living Labor Power,' 36.

[519] "Marx says in *Capital* that the creation of social wealth, the wealth of an entire society, is tied to the impoverishment of the individual laborer," Negt and Kluge write. "This means that the worker, who divests himself and disposes of his essential powers, does not really take part in this wealth he produces." (HO, 130)

[520] See Chapter II, section I above.

yet—contrary to what some forms of Marxism might claim—cannot be reduced to mere reflections of the (economic) process of commodity production.[521]

As Christopher Pavsek has noted, this has important consequences for the conceptualization of capitalism as a social system. He writes:

> Due to this conceptual shift, the distinction between base and superstructure virtually falls away, the superstructure now existing in economic terms and subsumed within the realm of (social) production.[522]

When Negt and Kluge speak of the reorganization of social production, that is, they are not only speaking in terms of a 'redistribution' of material wealth, but include symbolic and cultural wealth. Indeed, for Negt and Kluge, all of the social constituencies which lack what Sandra Bartky calls 'cultural autonomy' are also victims of (psychic or material) expropriation/appropriation of their 'means' of production.[523] Similarly, the persistence of primitive accumulation of labour power by capitalism through a logic of separation (presented in detail in Chapter II) can now be seen to include

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[521] This shift has become prominent in many feminist theories, whose aim is to highlight the value of activities usually considered 'non-productive' but also 'feminine,' or what they also call 'reproductive' labour. These categorizations, critics argue, have legitimized capitalist female oppression. See, e.g., Nancy Fraser, 'Behind Marx's Hidden Abode,' *New Left Review* 86, (March – April 2014), Silvia Federici, 'Social Reproduction Theory. History, issues and present challenges,' *Radical Philosophy* 2.04 (Spring 2019), or Angela Yvonne Davis, 'The Approaching Obsolescence of Housework: A Working-Class Perspective,' chapter 13 of *Women, culture & politics*. (New York: Vintage, 1990).

[522] Pavsek, 'Negt and Kluge's Redemption of Labor,' 147.

[523] According to Bartky, both forms of 'alienation' "involve a splitting off of human functions from the human person, a forbidding of activities thought to be essential to a fully human existence. Both subject the individual to fragmentation and impoverishment." See Bartky, 'On Psychological Oppression,' 32. In this way, Negt and Kluge write: "This distributive public sphere is, however, now as before really determined by its structure of production as the overdetermining factor; this is based not simply on previous production, but rather *is constantly reproduced anew from the everyday experience of the people who are subsumed beneath it*. If one understands the essential context, production is that which overdetermines the public sphere." (PSE, 4; my emphasis.)

the appropriation of what is typically understood as non-productive labour (e.g. 'care' labour) or even of capacities like fantasy and imagination central for the balance labour performed by the subject—something that will become relevant for the role of art discussed below. Hence why, e.g., the culture industry's imposition of stereotypes and the imputation of pre-interpreted needs are forms of reproducing the logic of capitalism.

Given the above, I take it that Negt and Kluge's contention aims to find the commonalities behind *all* of the groups that participate in the production of the social horizon of experience, but that cannot harvest the benefits of their labour—insofar as they remain (psychically, physically, symbolically) oppressed or alienated. All of those groups would be better served under a different social organization of production, and could thus be said to share a common interest. These groups include the working class, but also all the social constituencies that participate in the constitution of experience and culture (even through, e.g., activities like cultural consumption), i.e. in the constitution of a public sphere which, nevertheless, confronts them as something alien.[524]

Negt and Kluge's conceptualization of capitalism encompasses every aspect of capitalist oppression or alienation, given that we understand oppression as the appropriation of either physical and psychological capacities, and alienation as "the estrangement or separating of a person from some of the essential attributes of personhood," as Sandra Bartky defines it.[525] For Negt and Kluge *this logic of appropriation* is inherently capitalist and, thus, it is a logic that, according to their analysis, everyone that is 'marginalized,' 'alienated,' excluded from hegemonic culture would—if properly aware of this fact—have an interest in overcoming.

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[524] Understood as such, those who are denied the possibility of self-affirmation within a culture or public sphere that they themselves created, are victims of the capitalist logic of separation.

[525] Bartky, 'On Psychological Oppression,' 30.

Negt and Kluge's conceptualization, and their broadening of the notion of social production, also invites the reader to consider the creation of culture as a human endeavour, and thus of society itself as a human product. But if this is the case, it means that the capitalist organization of production is contingent, and that it can be produced anew.

I.2 The 'Proletarian'

Once production is understood in this broader sense, Negt and Kluge's references to the process of production or to the producing class take a completely different shading. As we have seen, for them production is also the production of experience, and is henceforth performed inside factories, but also in the 'private' sphere of the household, and what is more, it is also performed by "the everyday experience of the people [who constantly reproduce the public sphere anew]." (PSE, 4) In an oblique sense, their use of the word 'proletarian' *is* indebted to Marx's, who used it in reference to those subjects who do not own the means of production and whose labour power is appropriated. The caveat, however, is that this does not refer exclusively to wage-labourers anymore.

When Negt and Kluge refer to 'the proletariat,' then, they are not referring to what is sociologically or economically defined as the working class, but to those subjects that are constituted as the negative result of society or, differently put, to everyone that has been alienated or separated from its productive activity. Hansen has accordingly contended that Negt and Kluge use the term 'proletariat' as a "category of negation," intended to conceptualize what has remained underdeveloped, marginalized, oppressed within our current cultural, political and economic systems.[526] As Negt and

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[526] Hansen, 'Foreword,' xxxi.

Kluge put it, the 'proletarian' as a concept points to the foundation (the experiences of expropriation, of oppression) upon which the context of living of the workers is built, yet is not reducible to them:

> In the proletariat there is concentrated the practical negation of the existing world that need only be conceptualized to become part of the history of the political emancipation of the working class." (PSE, xlv)

Negt and Kluge are here *not* equating 'proletariat' with 'working class.' Rather, they are but pointing out that the political demands of the 'working class' are "forms of expression" of a way of relating to the social whole which they define as the appropriation and exploitation of labour, and of their cognitive and affective capacities. This includes all those subjects excluded from public participation and denied the possibility of self-determination of their modes of living.[527] As such, the 'proletariat' intersects with *but* transcends the 'working class.' As Hansen puts it, then, what the term 'proletarian' epitomises is "the historical subject of alienated labour *and* experience."[528]

Importantly, this means that an individual can be deemed a 'proletarian' in certain aspects or contexts of his or her life, without him or her always necessarily being in that position. Hence why Negt and Kluge would rather speak of individual traits or capacities as 'proletarian,' and not of whole subjects. 'Real historical developments do not move on the side of the "complete person" and "whole proletarian" but on the side of their individual qualities,' they write in *Public Sphere and Experience*. (PSE, 296) For example, a worker is separated from his labour at the workplace, but he too exploits the labour of his partner in the household—and in that second relation, it is not he who is in the position

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527 PSE, xlv-xlvi. According to Marx, in this vein, the proletariat's demands—e.g. the dissolution of the existing order, the negation of private property—are only expressions of "what society has already made a principle for the proletariat."

528 Hansen, 'Reinventing the Nickelodeon,' 393. My emphasis.

of the proletarian, but her. It is important to recall here that Negt and Kluge consider the 'proletarian' (what I have called above the 'subject of capitalism') to be a fragmented subject, which navigates different life contexts and power relations and thus develops its traits and capacities asynchronously.[529] According to them, because of this, it is mistaken to speak of *the* 'proletarian' as a stable political or psychological subject, something that contrast with the well-determined economic definition that Marx provides.[530] Fore therefore rightly notes that Negt and Kluge

> move beyond an essentialist conception of the proletariat, a social category that traditional Marxist criticism mistakenly tailored to the contours of the humanist individual. They use the word "proletarian" not as a "concept for a substance," but as a placeholder for the sum of the repressed characteristics of man. For there is no proletarian subject, properly speaking. At least not yet.[531]

What Negt and Kluge call 'proletarian,' therefore, is not intended to capture in full the substantive elements of a certain type of subject, or to pigeonhole a certain class position, but to pin together different vectors of oppression or alienated modes of living. What unites certain individuals under the banner of 'proletarians' is that their capacities have been appropriated or repressed, allowed to develop (if at all) only in an alienated manner. And whereas historically the 'working class' became associated—because its position in the capitalist relations of production—with the proletariat, the term, as Negt and Kluge render it, is not exclusive to it. We could surely think in these terms of, e.g., the demands of women and non-white people, and of all who are, as Bartky puts it, "denied an

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[529] See Chapter II section I on 'Labour capacities,' and footnote 170 above.

[530] Fore, 'Introduction,' 38.

[531] Fore, 'Introduction,' 38.

autonomous choice of self, forbidden cultural expression, and condemned to the immanence of mere bodily being [and thus] cut off from the sorts of activities that define what it is to be human."[532]

The way to understand Negt and Kluge's 'proletarian subject,' then, is by thinking of it as the category that brings together all the subjects that have been (re)producing society through their mental and material labour, and yet whose capacities have not been allowed to develop autonomously. Rather, these have been shaped by the logic of capitalism through the fragmentation of experience, the appropriation of their powers, and the heteronomous determination of their contexts of living. As Negt and Kluge contend, the 'proletarian context of living' needs to be initially defined negatively "as a context of blockage wherein experience, needs, wishes, and hopes do concretely come into being but cannot develop in an autonomous fashion." (PSE, 296)

While the (anachronistic) language Negt and Kluge use, as well as their (often) excessive focus on the working class, might make it seem as if there is a tendency in their work to move toward an economic reductionism, a more careful reading makes it clear that this is not really the case. Negt and Kluge's work is intended to pluralize the perspectives and the experiences of oppression from which a struggle against capitalism can emerge. In so doing, they also want to make the readers aware that structural change—if it is to be genuinely democratic—requires *more* than a transformation of the 'relations of production.'

Oppression, alienation, and separations happen, Negt and Kluge are aware, in many dimensions not tied to the sphere of (material) production. Notably, this also implies that social change—if it is to be truly emancipatory—cannot leave *any* part of the 'proletarian' behind. As we have seen in previous chapters, the cultural domination that happens when identities are imposed

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[532] Bartky, 'On Psychological Oppression,' 31.

heteronomously, for example, or the symbolic violence to which, e.g., Blacks, women, queer, transgender, or immigrant people are subject to, must also be eliminated. In today's capitalism, experiences of both material or symbolic oppression can act as springboards for a social awareness and self-reflection that can be directed toward radical change.

II) The 'Proletarian' Public Sphere

Negt and Kluge's theory attempts to show the possibilities of overcoming reification and the numbness of experience. According to them, building an oppositional public sphere is vital for this task, since, as Kluge writes, it can "[increase] the possibilities for a public articulation of experience," allowing individuals to develop awareness of their role as 'proletarians,' i.e. as the producers of society.[533] This public sphere—for Negt and Kluge the precondition for a possible revolutionary change—should be understood, in this initial sense, as site (not necessarily a physical one) that engenders resistance against capitalism, with its tendency toward the abstract organization of society and the separation from every qualitative aspect of human life.[534]

But as we have seen, resistance alone does not suffice to build a true proletarian public sphere. Rather, it has to lead to the development of a consciousness that "recognizes the limitations of commodity production and makes the context of living itself the object of production." (PSE, 8) The proletarian public sphere should therefore *avoid* furthering the idea of an abstract opposition between subject and object, something that engenders an "impotent opposition of thinking individual and social totality." (PSE, 8) This abstract opposition, Negt and Kluge argue, occludes the link between

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533 Kluge, 'On Film and the Public Sphere,' 38.

534 Capitalist society, Negt and Kluge write, "separates itself from use-values, human needs, the interests of the workers, and, finally, from its own bourgeois class, which brought capitalism into being." (PSE, 185-186)

the experiences of oppression and exclusion and the social totality, and could even end up strengthening the social structures it attempts to oppose. (PSE, 8)[535]

A genuine 'proletarian experience' should be initially understood, instead, as an experience based on a mimetic relation between subjects, as one that can comprehend the subjective component within social relations, social structures, and within experience itself. In short, 'proletarian experience' is a type of experience that recognizes—to recall Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism—the labour invested in producing society, and conceives that society as its own product. "Commodified things are not thingly; they are crystallized human characteristics, metamorphosed human beings," as Kluge reminds us in one of his latest films, *News From Ideological Antiquity*.[536] In a first sense, we can understand the public sphere as a process whereby a genuine 'proletarian experience' is produced.

This qualitative new mode of thought—which I call 'proletarian' or 'class' consciousness—would be one that does not conceive of social organization and social production in a merely technical or instrumental sense, but sees them as factors that determine the forms and contents of experience. In short, it is a mode of thought that becomes aware of the impact of structural and social conditions on consciousness (the objective determination of the subject), but which also recognizes that those social structures are, in the last instance, human-made (thereby possessing a subjective character).[537] It

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[535] While Negt and Kluge would disagree with Adorno's thesis regarding the impossibility of any form of progressive political praxis within our capitalist society, they would surely agree that if praxis is guided merely by a 'tactical' and 'instrumental' form of thinking, it is bound to be self-defeating. That is, for Negt and Kluge it is not the case that *all* "practice that would matter is barred," (ND, 245) even if, indeed, social activism needs to be guided by critical and autonomous individuals. They thus agree with Adorno about a "pseudo-activity [that] deceives about the debilitation of a praxis presupposing a free and autonomous agent that no longer exists." (Adorno, 'Marginalia to Theory and Praxis,' 270.)

[536] Excerpt from *News From Ideological Antiquity.* Cited in Christian Schulte, 'All Things are Enchanted Human Beings,' in *Alexander Kluge. Raw Materials*, 413.

[537] Compare PSE, 5, to Adorno, who speaks of the subjective moment in the object, and conversely, of the objectivity

is this link that, according to Negt and Kluge, connects experiential insight and critical thought with praxis: This awareness should lead to the recognition that, if a *truly* autonomous and self-determined experience is to emerge, a transformation in the organization of social production is required. Note, however, that production here is already understood as much more than the production of commodities, but as something they describe as

> a concept that had as its object the production of agents of socialization, of language, of the construction of the drive structure, the production of experience, of collective entities and public spheres—in other words, the production of life contexts. (PSE, 8)

This transformation of experience within an emerging proletarian public sphere, Negt and Kluge contend, would have to lead to what they call a "cultural revolution," that is, to "the radical revolutionizing of forms of production and thought, customs and emotions, within which life interests are expressed." (PSE, 160) Achieving such a revolutionary change, however, would require not only an appropriation of the means of production (such as a traditional Marxist account would call for) nor merely a 'cultural' or symbolic recognition of different identities and lifestyles. Rather (in line with Adorno's call for a true historical change) it would require achieving a non-violent synthesis between particular and universal, individual and collective, and the organization of society in a way in which the aim is the development of human capacities.[538] The 'proletarian' public sphere would be the site where a self-conscious and global subject would emerge, i.e. a collective subject where individuals *qua* social producers can determine autonomously their own contexts of living, and where they collectively "choose and control the social conditions of their lives to the fullest possible extent."[539] In this second

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of the subject. (See Adorno, 'On Subject, and Object,' in Critical Models, *Minima Moralia*, 69-70, or ND, 183.)

538 See also Adorno, 'Progress,' 144.

539 Bohman, *Public Deliberation*, 11. Bohman there is glossing out Horkheimer's program for critical theory, which

sense, the 'proletarian' public sphere becomes more than a process of triggering 'class' consciousness, but a qualitatively new horizon of experience.

Negt and Kluge, that is, understand the proletarian public sphere (i) as a learning and consciousness-raising *process* where resistance vis-à-vis capitalism can lead to 'seeing through' reification and to the emergence of class consciousness, but also (ii) as an alternative form of social organization, i.e. as the resulting social horizon, which is built by class conscious subjects. As a process, the proletarian public sphere fosters a consciousness which develops from 'below,' i.e. from the subject's own experiences, and makes them aware that it is possible to re-organize society; as a result, it would be a qualitatively new social horizon of experience and context of living—the background practices, assumptions, forms of interaction—that is autonomously produced by the people and allows all individuals to formulate collectively their demands and goals. The 'proletarian' public sphere, therefore, should not be understood as a particular institution or set of institutions, but as a collective learning process which revolutionizes the forms of thought, of labour, or production, and the resulting (and qualitatively different) social structure.

II.1 The Public Sphere as a Model of Mediation Between Particular and Universal

In line with their critique of the 'bourgeois' model of the public sphere and the defence of the role of counter-public spheres, Negt and Kluge contend that an alternative and truly emancipatory public sphere should emerge from *and* preserve to the greatest extent possible the self-expression of individuals. It therefore needs to respect the pluralism of individual and group-specific needs and their different forms of expression. However, it is also the site where "everything that is actually or

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Negt and Kluge (however indirectly) follow.

ostensibly relevant for *all* members of society is integrated." (PSE, 2) This implies that in the 'proletarian' public sphere, the pluralism of interests and needs would have to be dealt with collectively.

This point is central, since, first, while Negt and Kluge reject the contention that the public sphere and society writ large needs to be organized technically or abstractly,[540] they also insist that society cannot be simply guided by self-interests, by the "multiple individualism" characteristic of neo-liberal capitalism.[541] The need for a public or collective validation of needs and interests is also a way to distinguish between better or worse interpretations of these.[542] While Negt and Kluge do not discuss this issue in detail, arguably, this call for public validation could be productively read as demanding the assessment of the legitimacy of individual and group needs by measuring the extent that these avoid exclusion, do not disadvantage other groups, and are arrived at through (to the extent that this is possible) democratic interactions.[543]

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540 This is a position associated with Habermas' division between lifeworld and system. For a critique, see Nancy Fraser, 'What's Critical About Critical Theory?' and for a defence of this position see, e.g. Cohen, 'Critical Social Theory and Feminist Critiques,' both found in *Feminists Read Habermas*.

541 See, e.g., PSE, 88. Also, PSE, 258; 260.

542 Negt and Kluge sometimes speak of 'real' needs. (PSE, xlv) I avoid the term here since it could be read as an essentializing of these. Let me note, however, that when they refer to 'real' needs, they are not appealing to a static human essence, but to those needs that (at a given historical epoch) are necessary for achieving satisfaction and self-realization. Hence why Negt and Kluge also speak of the 'resolution' *and* 'transformation of interests. Thus, in line with Adorno, I would argue that for them, too, "[i]f production were immediately, unconditionally and unrestrictedly reorganized according to the satisfaction of needs—even and especially those produced by capitalism—then the needs themselves would be decisively transformed." Theodor Adorno, 'Theses on Need,' trans. Martin Schuster and Iain Macdonald, in *Adorno Studies*, Volume 1, Issue 1, (January 2017): 103. I come back to this issue briefly in the conclusions of this Thesis.

543 In this vein, Fraser suggests "balancing procedural and consequentialist considerations. More simply, it involves balancing democracy and equality." (Fraser, 'Talking about Needs,' 312)

In this sense, I tentatively render Negt and Kluge's account of the 'proletarian' public sphere *qua* model of mediation as follows: The proletarian public sphere would have to become a site where counter-publics persist but that requires the *interaction* between groups, and, consequently, the intra-group validation of needs and interests. This interaction would be needed to assess the legitimacy of specific group-based demands.[544] Given these desiderata, it would be possible to distinguish between the needs of a Neo-Nazi or White Supremacist counter-public, and those of the lesbian and gay community, to give an example. Clearly, the former examples are based on demands that do not promote (either material or symbolic) equality, nor do they promote democratic processes. In contrast, political claims by lesbian or gay groups are mostly, as Young argues, "claims that they should be free to be openly different from the majority without suffering social and economic disadvantage on account of that difference."[545] Arguably, the latter's claims would have more legitimacy when calling for the social and political fulfilment of their demands.[546]

Important in this regard is, moreover, that Negt and Kluge speak of the proletarian public sphere not as a collection or sum of interests, but as a "crystallizing point," which means that it is "[a] public sphere that reflects the interests and experiences of the overwhelming majority of the

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[544] As Nancy Fraser has argued, (progressive) counter-publics thus "[militate] in the long run against separatism because [these assume] an orientation that is *publicist*. In so doing, they tend toward the constitution of what Negt and Kluge call a 'proletarian' public sphere. Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere,' 67. Emphasis in original.

[545] Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 107.

[546] Whether the former should be banned from receiving a public venue for their expression is something that I do not discuss. Given Negt and Kluge's account of (mis)oriented energy and fantasy, and of the need to allow for self-expression 'from below,' they would perhaps think it would be better if those demands could be discussed and expressed in public. In this way, the antagonist energies that sustain them might be (re)directed to other, more progressive demands.

population, insofar as these experiences and interests are real." (PSE, xlv) In this sense Negt and Kluge define the category of the proletarian public sphere as the site where

> no raw material of social revolution, no concrete interest remains excluded and unresolved. It thereby ensures that the medium of this resolution and transformation of interests is the real context of production and societilization as a whole ... The proletarian public sphere is the correct application of the various categories by means of which living interests generalize themselves without destroying, as dead interests and norms, the whole living substance that they wish to organize. (PSE, 208)

The 'proletarian' public sphere, therefore, does not denote particular forms of interaction or contents, as, e.g., the bourgeois public sphere (modelled on abstract procedures of rational discussion). Rather, it is a process of public interaction where individuals must make sure that no material of upheaval, and *no concrete interest* remains excluded, no point of view or perspective unaccounted for. The construction of a 'proletarian' public sphere would have to allow for a non-violent reconciliation between individual freedom, happiness, and autonomy; and for the collective unfolding of humanity as what Marx would call a 'species being.' According to Negt and Kluge, the former cannot be achieved without the latter, since—again with Marx—they consider humanity as a form of life that "requires the polis for its self-realization."[547] This implies, however, that the current principle of social organization—based on private accumulation and on the exclusion of human interests and qualities—which has led to the commodification of society and the reification of consciousness, must be transformed *as a whole*. (PSE, 7)

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[547] Fore, 'Introduction,' 28. In this vein, Fore cites Marx, who writes: "The human being is in the most literal sense a *zoon politikon*. . . an animal which can individuate itself only in the midst of society." (Marx, *Grundrisse*, 84)

It is noteworthy that, according to Negt and Kluge, while the 'proletarian' public sphere—as a qualitatively new and autonomously constituted social horizon of experience—is still a matter for the future, the *process* of building a 'proletarian' consciousness which points toward its eventual realization is already taking place. And yet, this is not happening there where official politics are deciding (without considering the voices of the oppressed) the next social reform or choosing the next public representative. Rather, it is a process taking place where threats to the legitimacy of the established social order are suppressed (be it by violent means, or by more symbolic forms of silencing). (PSE, 65; 70)[548] Or there, in spheres and counter-publics which foster and kindle relations of care or cooperation, of trust and reliability, for example—relations which contain the potential to undermine the logic of capitalism.[549] These are the sites where what Kluge calls the 'political intensity of everyday feelings' is being stirred, turning anger, fantasy, i.e. obstinate reactions, into a 'proletarian' consciousness.

A way to identify an emerging 'proletarian' public sphere, hence, is through the attempts by the hegemonic social structure to, as Hansen puts it, "suppress, fragment, delegitimize, or assimilate" these public formations. Those attempts would be so suppressed, she continues, when they "[suggest] an alternative autonomous organization of experience."[550] What such a suppression or integration aims to achieve is blocking the development of a more encompassing critical consciousness. For Negt and Kluge, the 'proletarian' contexts of life (a working class culture, a women's mode of life, Black culture,

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548 PSE, 3: "The most important fundamental decisions about modes of organization and the constitution of experience antedate the establishment of the bourgeois mode of production." See also PSE, 64-73 on the bourgeois monopoly of power and its legitimation.

549 See PSE, 22, note 36. See also *History and Obstinacy's* chapter VII on 'Love politics.'

550 Hansen, 'Foreword,' xxxii. Negt and Kluge mention, e.g., the organization of the English working class in the 19th century, that according to their reading managed to consolidate structures of communication that were self-posited. (See PSE, 187)

a queer culture) survive in Western capitalist societies, but in fragments, in traces, in the margins, or as Negt and Kluge put it, as "historical fissures." Wildcat strikes, protest movements, occupations, but also aesthetic performances, subcultural interventions that truly question the current social order, for example, are some of the sites from where 'proletarian consciousness' can emerge, and, therefore, where a 'proletarian' public sphere can begin to develop concretely. (PSE, xliii)[551]

The above also shows something that is central, namely, that the distinction between what counts as a counter-public and what counts as a 'proletarian' public is not clear cut, and that usually the seeds for a proletarian consciousness emerge from within counter-public spheres. What needs to be assessed, therefore, is whether the consciousness of resistance and opposition developed within counter-public spheres can evolve or is already evolving into something more encompassing, i.e. into a consciousness aware of the structural dimensions of oppression. This does not mean eliminating or eclipsing particular interests for the sake of general, or universal ones, but rather, the awareness that only through deep, structural changes—i.e. changes to the totality of the social horizon of experience and production—can the particular needs be satisfied.

The developing of such a 'proletarian' consciousness, and with this the emergence of a proletarian public sphere *qua* process, requires that individuals come to terms with the public and structural dimensions of their experience and alienation; and that they come to the realization that *as* proletarians, they are actually the producers of society and that it is in their hands to produce the social horizon (and thus their experience) anew. Regarding counter-publics, this implies, first, the need to transcend what Negt and Kluge call a 'camp' mentality—that mentality that claims 'private property'

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[551] "A strike, for example," Negt and Kluge write, "is the temporary conscious separation of living labor from the resources of dead labor; it is supposed to win portions of dead labor for the realization of living labor. A general strike presents the functional incapacity of dead labor as entirely sensuous and manifest." (HO, 129)

over one's identity or one's struggle, or that sets itself in abstract opposition to what stands outside its group.[552] But it also implies going beyond the mere function "to protect individuals from the direct influence of bourgeois interests and ideologies." (PSE, 61) This stage—characteristic of counter-publics—Negt and Kluge argue, is not "sufficiently rooted in the production process itself for it to be able to revolutionize production." (PSE, 61)

In order to transcend their limited function as a mere refugee from the logic of capital, counter-publics need to communicate and cooperate among each other, and stop seeing *their* needs as 'private' needs. Hence, as Hansen puts it, the issue becomes one of building bridges among different publics. It becomes a question "of translation, of communicating across a widening arena of discursive contestation." (PSE, xxxvii) If this is achieved, a 'proletarian' public sphere—as "the space in which politics is first made possible at all and communicable"—could be said to be emerging.[553]

II.2 Constructing The Public Sphere and the Labour of Theory: From Resistance to Class Consciousness

Negt and Kluge's book on the public sphere ends up with a rhetorical call for a form of political organization that gives shape to the fantasies and wishes of individuals, to their alienated obstinacy, and that creates situations and arenas where capacities can be freed from distortion, and in so doing permit human self-realization. The political aim would be for the oppressed subjects to develop a 'class consciousness' by reorganizing their experience according to their own needs and interests—thus allowing them to also organize society in their own terms. (PSE, 297) Whether the social totality

[552] See e.g. Kluge, 'On Film and the Public Sphere,' 39.

[553] Kluge, 'On Film and the Public Sphere,' 40.

serves as the medium for a non-violent synthesis between individuals, or whether it continues to reproduce oppression, will depend on the capacity of the public sphere for making subjects capable "of articulating otherwise repressed experiences that, when collectively organized, could constitute resistance," as Richard Langston writes.[554]

Negt and Kluge's emphasis on self-determination and on a form of organization that moves from the bottom-up—based on the concrete experiences and life contexts of its members—grounds their "counterhegemonic" model of the public sphere, which should be sought, as Hansen writes,

> not on the intellectual plane, but in the ongoing transformation of existing contexts of production and consumption, in the material dynamics of expropriation and reappropriation, of differentiation and globalization.[555]

However, given the prevailing exclusion and repression from the public sphere, those experiences that need to become part of the public sphere are usually experiences of blockages, of alienation, of speechlessness. Marginalized and oppressed groups are constantly encountering limits to what they can articulate, to what they can say or do in public. (PSE, 296) Not being able to participate in the public sphere has hindered people's communicative abilities, made them unable to articulate their own needs and interests. The real conditions—which, as Kluge writes, "have slipped into the functional"—cannot be grasped.[556] People, influenced by the capitalist value abstraction, confuse what is phenomenologically present (what can be immediately grasped with the senses) with what is 'real.'[557] The way capitalism and the public sphere structure reality and the subjective experience

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[554] Langston, 'Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge,' 323.

[555] Hansen, 'Foreword,' xxxvii.

[556] Kluge, 'On Film and the Public Sphere,' 46.

[557] See also HO, 236-239, and Jameson, 'On Negt and Kluge,' 173, who renders the functional dimension of reality

of it, that is, does not allow subjects to grasp the production process that lies behind the construction of reality.[558]

Under those conditions, the problem facing Negt and Kluge lies in justifying how those experiences of alienation and oppression can, nevertheless, become part of our consciousness and lead, *not only* to a reconfiguration of our own identities, but to an awareness of the structural dimension of alienation and oppression. For Negt and Kluge, it is here that the labour of theory and art have a role to play.

The focus on the critical and emancipatory role of theory and art (a role that is related to the generation of autonomous thinking) positions Negt and Kluge close to Adorno, whose emphasis on the importance of the aesthetic and of intellectual labour has already been discussed. Nevertheless, Negt and Kluge also distance themselves from Adorno's aesthetic theory, since they reject the model that posits 'autonomous' art as the safeguard of critique, and the intellectual 'vanguard' (those who can decode art's truth) as the sole possessors of critical thought. Rather, Negt and Kluge speak of a tension between intellectual labour and the self-experiences of the masses, which are in *direct* contact with suffering, violence, alienation.

In terms similar to Hans-Jürgen Krahl, one of Adorno's most famous critics, for Negt and Kluge the value of theoretical and artistic labour, *contra* Adorno, lies in the development of conceptual tools "which can no longer be derived from the experience of crude impoverishment," as Krahl

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as "[what] is structurally not fully perceptible within the set of immediate coordinates."

[558] See also, HO, 131-132, on 'labour power as result and process': That individuals cannot recognize their own labour behind commodities and behind social institutions, Negt and Kluge write, "pertains to fact (sic) that considerable portions of these activities expire, as it were, below the threshold of consciousness and then become, through their partial objectification in the result, neither more visible nor more conscious."

writes.[559] However, Negt and Kluge go beyond Krahl since, as they note, this capacity to develop artificial, specialized products, is also a weakness, since it lacks the richness and concreteness of the direct, material experience of oppression or suffering. (HO, 183-184)[560] It is the oppressed masses who "possess material, sensual evidence of the restriction of possibilities in their lives, of their freedom of movement," and who in their fantasy and obstinacy "safeguard" a proletarian mode of production. (PSE, 43)[561]

Negt and Kluge do not deny that the intellectual avant-garde can objectify social experience in their products,[562] but they do contend that if the form of articulation of autonomous art remains "a step ahead of the developing experience of the masses," it will not be able to 'speak' to the people, as it were, thereby losing its addressee. More importantly, it will not allow the audiences to speak back, and recover their voices:

> This authentic art remains ... largely without an audience; in part it speaks to small, educated strata and progressive criticism. While it is producing, the actual producers of social

559 Hans-Jürgen Krahl, 'The Political Contradiction in Adorno's Critical Theory,' *Telos* 21, (1974): 833. Compare too, e.g., HO, 183-184.

560 It "lacks a materialistic instinct, the unity of life, and labor contexts. Such knowledge-constitutive activity is terrified . . . by the distant effects of fantasy," Negt and Kluge write. (HO, 184) See also PSE, 25: "[T]he scientist or scholar is capable of subjectively placing behind his cognitive activity a sense of necessity that is not directly rooted in his economic situation."

561 Interestingly, it would seem that Negt and Kluge complement Adorno's argument, according to whom the import of artworks preserves mimetic forms that are anti-capitalist since they are non-instrumental. For Negt and Kluge, as we have seen, in fantasy a non-instrumental mode of production is also preserved.

562 And actually, Negt and Kluge argue that what could possible trigger a cooperation between the intellectuals and the masses is the awareness that they, too, are producers, an awareness missing in the intellectual 'vanguard' defended by Adorno. See PSE, 24, and PSE, 177-178. In this vein, they are close to the famous criticism of Adorno made by Krahl, who calls for "an organised partisanship of theory engaged in the liberation of the oppressed." (Krahl, 'The Political Contradiction in Adorno's Critical Theory,' 831)

experience, the masses, are incapable of an autonomous reply. (PSE, 175)

Negt and Kluge reject an intellectual practice that merely 'teaches' or indoctrinates, imposing its own 'correct theoretical standpoint' on the masses: telling people how they need to act would only reproduce the mechanisms of the bourgeois public sphere, thereby hindering autonomous thought. Yet, because reification is a reality, and because of the way society and experience are structured, they are aware that class consciousness will not merely emerge by itself, spontaneously. Obstinate forces such as fantasy are, because of their self-regulating mode of production, indeed "geared toward such a proletarian public sphere," Negt and Kluge insist. (PSE, 32) However, these must first be transformed into autonomous thought or "translated back into reality." (PSE, 33) Unsublated, their protest energy remains an abstract potential. (PSE, 31-32)

What is required to make art and theory productive for the project of emancipation, then, are forms of artistic and intellectual labour that, in creating conceptual and aesthetic objects, mediate between the material and concrete experiences of oppression, on the one hand, and the degree of abstraction achieved by intellectual labour, on the other. Further, it would have to be possible for these media to be "adopted by the majority of the population." (PSE, 26)[563] As Negt and Kluge put it, the emancipatory task for art and theory is therefore to "reorganize fantasies in order to make them capable of self-organization." (PSE, 176-177)[564] At stake is the possibility to process "indirect

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563 Note that, as we have seen in Chapters III and IV, even works that are not intentionally produced to generate critical consciousness (e.g. those objects produced by the consciousness industry) can be reappropriated, its material used to see the world differently, to create new identities. But in those cases the activity of reappropriation and world-disclosure is limited. In short, while those can lead to the formation of counter-public spheres (which yet remain surrounded by the pressure of the capitalist context of living), they do not suffice to unearth the 'functional' or structural dimension of alienation. It is here where further action is required, and where art and theory can intervene. As I discuss below, the labour of communication *within* the counter-publics also partakes in this process.

564 In this case, Negt and Kluge write, the "monopoly on rational language, the capacity for conceptualization,

experience as experience not via the direct senses, but by using the search and sensory functions of the abstracting head *together with the immediate senses*." (HO, 238; emphasis in original.) In this way, a *full experience* could be attained, triggering the production of a 'proletarian' public sphere.

In calling for the intervention of the labour of theory and art in everyday consciousness, Negt and Kluge connect intellectual labour and aesthetic production back with (a potential) political praxis. *Contra* Adorno, the success of intellectual labour, Negt and Kluge contend, "is dependent upon the use value of their products." (HO, 184) This use value, for its part, consists on the possibility to orient people toward constructing their *own* public sphere. As Kluge writes:

> We [artists and intellectuals] can count on the fact that no oppression is total. The issue then becomes the learning of proper ways of dealing with people . . .We must produce the self-confidence which is necessary to discover the objective possibilities of production underneath these fences [erected by corporations, by censorship, by authority] and we must take the offensive in fighting for this position. It is just as important to produce a public sphere as it is to produce politics, affection, resistance, protest.[565]

III) <u>**The Emancipatory Role of the Aesthetic**</u>

As we have seen throughout this chapter, not all forms of theory or art will be equally suited for the development of a 'proletarian' consciousness.[566] In the preceding discussions on the emancipatory role

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analysis, and abstraction" have no much use, since those theoretical tools—which have no room for particular experience, for fantasy, for the needs and wishes of the people—will end up excluding the experiences of the oppressed, and thus further alienating them. (PSE, 176)

[565] Kluge, 'On Film and the Public Sphere,' 41.

[566] Neither is my claim that *only* art is suited for this task. Other forms of intellectual work, as well as political actions, and even historical/natural events can trigger this consciousness-building process.

of the aesthetic, I have argued that, whether a work of art or culture can be a medium for the development of a critical thought, depends on its reception, and thereby on the ability to reflect social and historical problems back to the receiver. However, I also argued that such a process of reappropriation and of identity-formation is limited, and that the development of the more comprehensive 'proletarian' consciousness requires individuals to become aware, not only of the fact that they are alienated and oppressed, but also of the structural dimension of domination and alienation. (PSE, 6-8)

Differently put: in the case of building counter-publics, art that 'expands' experience (insofar as it allows people to play with the corrupted material available) and triggers resistance suffices. In the case of building a 'proletarian' public, works of art need to help lay bare those relations and structures that have become naturalized, allowing individuals to realize that it is possible to reconstruct their own history and their own social horizon of experience. Given Negt and Negt's concern with the self-experience of individuals, they would add the condition that, for a work of art to be deemed truly emancipatory, it cannot do this through the 'didacticism' that characterizes, e.g., Brecht's plays or Sergei Eisenstein's films;[567] nor through the elitism and paternalism that characterizes many works of theory and art that claim to possess the correct insights that the 'oppressed masses' lack.[568]

Notably, the collective process of 'consciousness-raising' that happens within counter-public spheres already goes a long way in developing the aforementioned level of awareness. It is therefore important to mention that, insofar as this process is taking place, it might be better suited for the

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567 For more on Kluge's distinction to Eisenstein see, e.g. Stuart Liebman, 'Why Kluge,' *October* 46, (Fall 1988) and for a comparison with Brecht, see Jan Bruck, 'Brecht's and Kluge's Aesthetics of Realism,' *Poetics* 17, (1988).

568 Kluge and Negt's perspective could be productively compared to Rancière's notion of the 'emancipated spectator,' something which I very briefly discuss below, but which transcends the scope of this thesis. See Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans Gregory Elliot, (London: Verso, 2011).

development of a 'class consciousness' than art or theory. But it is also the case that, many times, when this process takes place, it does so *through* aesthetic or theoretical means, or at least is facilitated by them.[569] Furthermore, most individuals do not participate in counter-public spheres and remain 'trapped' by the consciousness industry and by the oppressive and mystificatory context of capitalist alienation. In those cases, too, art has an important role to play.

It transpires that, as Negt and Kluge understand them, works of art and theory need to navigate a thin line, since they have to redirect or orient people's obstinacy and fantasy without, in the process, falling prey to an intellectual paternalism. Differently put, a work of art or theory needs to be both mimetic (thus reflecting, rather than controlling people's experience) and constructivist (i.e. build upon people's fantasies, revealing the hidden structures of reality) at the same time.[570] What is needed is to *encourage* autonomous thought, by producing works that allow individuals to gain awareness of their need (and the possibility) to reconfigure society.[571] But how can the aesthetic object allow for the 'spontaneous' unfolding of experience, while inserting "elements and analysis of historical structures, illuminating the social character of experience" and thus encourage further thought, as Bray puts it?[572]

In what follows, I explore Kluge's aesthetic works as an example of an aesthetic practice that has attempted to embody this double imperative. I suggest that Kluge's artistic *oeuvre* reflects his

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569 For example, in the case of the feminist public sphere and the anti-criminalisation of abortion, music and public performances have been key, as I illustrated in Chapter III above.

570 See Bray, 'Openness as a Form of Closure,' 150.

571 HO, 96. See also HO, 440 on 'orientation': "In a figurative sense, determining horizons vis-a-vis the center of experience (as well as the reciprocity between periphery and center) is one of the most important elements of the faculty of judgment."

572 Bray, 'Openness as a Form of Closure,' 151.

theoretical concerns, and calls for a practice where the richness of experience of the spectator is respected, which for him means orienting thought toward what lies beyond the grasp of immediacy.

III.1 Kluge and the Production of Experience

Kluge's aesthetic practice has been accompanying his theoretical collaborations with Negt—Kluge has been producing stories, novels, films, television works, since the 1960s—and have become the main focus of his attention in recent years. It could even be said that before being a theorist, Kluge is an artist—and not any type of artist but one whose works have always been concerned with contributing toward the development of autonomous thought and of a 'proletarian' public sphere. To achieve this, Kluge's works attempt to balance, on the one hand, the need to let the 'proletarians' (i.e. the producers of society) "[make] experiences on its own," (PSE, 201) with, on the other, the recognition that these experiences do not automatically apprehend the structural dimensions of society. (PSE, 28)[573] Michael Bray has, in this sense, spoken of Kluge's artistic work as "an effort to redress the socially imposed limitations that *Public Sphere and Experience* had analyzed,"[574] i.e., the paralysis of thought and the privatization and commodification of the public sphere which Negt and Kluge were already experiencing in the early 1970s.

Kluge's aesthetic *oeuvre* has two main intentions that fit almost seamlessly with the joint philosophical project developed with Negt: first, to reconstruct a full rationality by bringing together the 'aesthetic' and the 'analytic' moments of reason. Second, to intervene in the reconstruction of the

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[573] See also Kluge, 'The Political as Intensity of Everyday Feelings,' 284, or Kluge, 'On Film and the Public Sphere,' 46. Reality has slipped into the functional, Kluge says, and that is why it is so hard to make the obstinate attitude of people turn into a critical attitude—in short, people cannot directly perceive what is it that alienates them.

[574] Bray, 'Openness as a Form of Closure,' 150.

public sphere so that it can become an autonomously produced social horizon of experience. These two are clearly tied together, since only individuals with a full rationality and autonomy can constitute an emancipatory public sphere.[575] Given the argument construed in his and Negt's critical theory, it also follows that, for the time being, the first task holds priority. To achieve it, Kluge contends, an alienated consciousness has to be reconfigured by recovering the sensual and imaginative capacities that the current public sphere represses. Art's task, then, would be to mediate between "the impulse to bring what is already experienced to public expression and the drive to produce new orderings of experience, more adequate to the socio-historical context and its transformation."[576]

Kluge's interventions are attempts to mediate between the somatic, imaginative experiences of the individuals (usually still disconnected from the functional and structural dimension of reality) and a theoretical understanding of reality, in order to motivate an active reception which furthers critical and autonomous thought. Kluge's work utilizes many strategies to achieve this, among which we could mention the "literarization" of film, with which he aims to produce a more complex viewing by inserting intertitles (and even voice-overs) through which he fragments the representational (i.e. photographic) base of film.[577] Notably, a similar strategy is used in his novels and theoretical works, where images are interspersed, breaking with the naturalized and reified modes of reading.

Another strategy is the crossing between documentary and fiction, a crossing whose goal is to problematize that division between what is 'real' and what is not. Fictional discourse (the discourse of fantasy and the imagination) as Hansen notes, is 'real,' so Kluge contends, insofar as it emerges from

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575 See Liebman, 'Why Kluge?,' 7.

576 Bray, 'Openness as a Form of Closure,' 150.

577 'Literarization' is the term used by Hansen to describe Kluge's technique (not Kluge's) and is borrowed from Brecht. See Hansen, 'Alexander Kluge,' 178.

a protest against reality, and yet it can still regress to a subjective and abstract point of view.[578] Documentary forms, for their part, tend to confuse the immediacy of what is perceivable with reality, with objectivity—thus occluding the real weight of the functional and the structural dimensions of society, as well as the labour that goes into producing them. In this vein, Kluge writes:

> Reality is real in that it really oppresses men. It is unreal in that every oppression only displaces energies. They disappear from sight but they continue to work underground. The repressed is the source of all labour underneath the terror of the real.[579]

Kluge aims at exposing reality as the 'historical fiction' that it is, and at recovering the real weight and potential contained in the fictive, in the 'fantastic.' And this is something he achieves through, in this case, blurring the line between documentation and fictional storytelling.

To motivate active and autonomous thinking, and in doing so problematizing our understanding of what is real, Kluge produces works that seem incomplete, fragmented, incoherent, works which cannot be 'understood.' Similarly to Adorno, Kluge rejects the 'didacticism' of explicitly politically committed works—of works which, in trying to foster autonomy, end up imputing a certain way of thinking, a pre-given conception of reality. Adorno, for example, goes as far as characterizing Brecht's 'didactic' plays (paradigmatic of such a political commitment) as "intolerant of the ambiguity in which thought originates" and thus as "authoritarian." (AT, 242) Kluge would not disagree. The work of art, according to him, must oppose what he calls an 'imperialism of consciousness': "Understanding a film completely is conceptual imperialism which colonises its objects. If I have

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578 See Miriam Hansen, 'Cooperative Auteur Cinema and Oppositional Public Sphere: Alexander Kluge's Contribution to Germany in Autumn,' in *Alexander Kluge. Raw Materials*, 60.

579 Kluge, 'The Sharpest Ideology,' 191.

understood everything then something has been emptied out."[580] Instead, in order to foster an experiential openness, Kluge provides works which are more like 'construction sites,' and which, as Huyssen notes, "systematically prevent reader identification and frustrate the pleasures of literariness."[581] This is the reason why his films and stories tend to leave the spectator with a feeling of incompleteness, of frustration. This is not accidental, however, but is intended to prevent the receiver from being absorbed by the diegesis of a seamless narrative, and thereby encourage an active reception.

In *Germany in Autumn* (1978), for example—a film about the terrorist events of the so-called 'German Autumn,' involving the Red Army Faction—Kluge and his collaborators combine not only their different perspectives, making what Kluge calls 'cooperative cinema,' but also elements of fiction and documentary, in order to make the spectators question the veracity of the events. The intention however—as explicitly stated by Kluge and the co-directors—was not adding "to the hundred thousand theories the first correct one," but to make the spectator reconceive "the possibility of different historical outcomes."[582] In line with Kluge's theoretical program, in his films, and this one is no exception, his aim is to "redirect [phantasy] to the real course of events," something that demands the active participation of the audience.[583] In encouraging their participation, he would ideally avoid forcing a specific way of reading the film, a correct way of "understanding," and rather make the spectator itself an ally that participates in the work's construction.[584] The apparently inconsistent, multifarious appearance of *Germany in Autumn*, as Forrest recounts, will not provide a 'partisan

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[580] Kluge, 'On film and the Public Sphere,' 38.

[581] Andreas Huyssen, 'An Analytic Storyteller in the Course of Time,' in *Alexander Kluge. Raw Materials,* 271.

[582] Forrest, *The Politics of Imagination*, 144-145.

[583] Kluge, "On Film and the Public Sphere," 44.

[584] Forrest, *The Politics of Imagination*, 133; and Huyssen, 'An Analytic Storyteller in the Course of Time,' 272.

statement' about the 'German Autumn,' leaving some spectators (those that were only looking to affirm their point of view, or to be told what their 'political' choices ought to be) dissatisfied. This dissatisfaction should, nonetheless, "stimulate the imagination of the spectator into reconceiving the possibility of different historical outcomes."[585]

In his literary account of the air raid on his hometown, the German city of Halberstadt, found in his *Neue Geschichten*, Kluge uses literary montage (i.e. the juxtaposition of apparently disconnected stories) and combines the account of the bombing as seen from the point of view of the pilots who bombarded the town—the perspective from "above," which not surprisingly is told in a highly technical, abstract manner—with the stories of the people "below," who try to react to the events but have no time nor the means to get to safety. Kluge writes of Frau Schrader, a cinema manager (and victim of the bombing) who cannot even find the right means for expressing her experience: "The houses were burning 'like torches'. She searched for a better expression for what she could so clearly see."[586] Kluge locates this passage—without making explicit connections—alongside the descriptions of the workers making the munitions (workers whose only goal is to "make a thorough, solid, trustworthy impression" on their bosses with their labour, as they mention),[587] and alongside a 'fake' interview with a pilot of one of the bombarding planes, who, after being asked why were the bombs still dropped—even when the city had surrendered—can only answer:

> The goods had to go down onto the city. They cost a lot of money. You couldn't just throw that away, in the mountains or open fields after it was produced at such expense. How

[585] Forrest, *The Politics of Imagination*, 144-145.

[586] Alexander Kluge, *Neue Geschichten, No. 1-18, 'Unheimlichkeit der Zeit'*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), 36.

[587] David Roberts, 'Alexander Kluge and German History,' in *Alexander Kluge. Raw Materials*, 135. See also Kluge, *Neue Geschichten,* 73.

could this, in your opinion, have been reported to the higher ups?[588]

The associations between these passages are left for the reader to build. What is clear, however, is that Kluge's account of the bombing aims not at producing a true, objective account of the events, nor a phenomenological, subjective account. As David Robert accounts, "[Kluge's] object rather is the extremely complicated dialectic of the concrete and the abstract, the visible and the invisible, the moment and history."[589]

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Kluge's films and stories, as do his theoretical works, try to construct a public sphere through the generation of a critical consciousness, something that requires taking into account both the productivity of fantasy and obstinacy, as well as the limits of one's own *and* the spectator's own perspectives and positions. But building a 'proletarian' public sphere also requires tracing lines of communication and cooperation—between the different publics, as well as between the public sphere of intellectuals and the oppressed masses. In this second sense, what Hilde Hein has called 'public art' is a concept that apprehends well (and can help us clarify) how Kluge's works intervene in the construction of a public sphere.

According to Hein, 'public art' is a form of art whose reception is collective and that "*produces* a public ... by means of an aesthetic interaction."[590] This public, we might add, should be critical, and should preserve the goal of fulfilling sensual and sensory needs, without disregarding particularity.

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588 Alexander Kluge, 'The Air Raid on Halberstadt, 8 April 1945,' in *Alexander Kluge. Raw Materials,* 159.

589 Roberts, 'Alexander Kluge and German History,' 130-131.

590 Hilde Hein, *Public Art: Thinking Museums Differently*, (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2006), 49. My emphasis.

Hein's description of public art captures well the role of what—in line with Negt and Kluge's work—we could alternatively call 'proletarian' works of art:

> The artwork may ... be the relationship between and among artists and publics—a process, not a thing. This process is social or even political at a grass-roots level. It is designed to build community, not to assume it. It is also meant to teach and to expose the conditions that separate communities as much as the communities link their members. [591]

In line with Negt and Kluge's theory of the public sphere, Hein asserts that if public art is to have an emancipatory intent, it should strive to start from the bottom-up, to build a 'community' or a public, and to make this by exposing—or rather, by intervening so that the public *itself* exposes—the structures that make their interests and needs appear separate and at odds with one another. Public art should also help its public realize their common interests, those that could lead them to build a community.[592]

At this point, it is worth exploring, at least briefly, whether Kluge's work functions as such, and if it achieves what he sets out to do. In a word: is Kluge's work successful? Does it manage to construct a public that is aware of its own interests, and whose awareness emerges from its *own* experiences? Has Kluge's artistic work or his theoretical work with Negt contributed to the construction of a 'proletarian' public sphere?

As I see it, the answer to this question would be better sought by combining an understanding of what Kluge's works are attempting to do with an analysis of their reception, and of the context upon which these are discussed, assessed, or consumed. In short, to know whether Kluge's intentions

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[591] Hein, *Public Art*, 73-75.

[592] See Zuidervaart, *Art in Public*, 123.

are actually being fulfilled, we would need to be able to account for whether or not his works have intervened in the constitution of a 'proletarian' consciousness. In what follows, in line with this, I discuss Kluge's filmic practice, mainly by focusing on one of his most polemical and interesting artworks: the film *News From Ideological Antiquity* (2008). The choice of this film—Kluge's attempt to film Marx's *Capital*—has to do with the fact that it illustrates Kluge's principles. But importantly, given that it would be antithetical to Negt and Kluge's project to discuss the film in isolation, I not only present the content and constructive principles of the film, but also attempt to situate it within its social and historical context (in relation to Kluge's own figure as a public intellectual, to its critical reception, to the academic discussion, and so forth).[593] My aim is to further the understanding of how exactly Kluge has attempted to contribute to the construction of a 'proletarian' public sphere.

III.2 Kluge's *News from Ideological Antiquity*

According to Negt and Kluge, as we have seen, helping subjects gain a comprehension of the structural dimension of social oppression requires supplementing the people's experiences of oppression with the intellectual work of theory and art. Such work, as Richard Langston contends, 'is a form of proletarian labor intent on re-establishing the social relationships that capital fragments and obscures as well as facilitating orientation "within nature, history, and society."'[594] To do so, Negt and Kluge contend, intellectual labour must respect the materiality of experience, therefore translating fantasy

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[593] Admittedly, the latter task is difficult to perform, and would require doing, e.g., empirical studies, not necessarily of the psychological reactions to the film, but of the way individuals have had the world 'disclosed anew' after viewing the film, or of the social/political organizations—the public spheres—that have emerged (or been influenced) by it.
[594] Richard Langston, 'The Work of Art as Theory of Work: Relationality in the Works of Weiss and Negt & Kluge,' *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory*, 83:3 (2008): 203. The last quotation is taken from the original German version of Negt and Kluge's *Geschichte und Eigensinn*. See DuM II, 482.

from its unsublated state back onto an alienated reality, so that the individual can learn to see that reality anew.

Montage is the main technical tool through which Kluge's film practice aims to perform this balancing act between intellectual labour and material experience. A technical device that does not interfere with images but rather "arranges them in a constellation," as Adorno wrote in an essay on film highly indebted to Kluge, montage is the filmmaker's answer to the capitalist narrowness of experience.[595] With it, Kluge attempts to produce films where the hidden relations within and between objects are exposed. This is performed by juxtaposing shots or images whose connection is not immediate, thereby generating a shock, in the sense of making the spectator suddenly "understand something in depth and then, out of this deepened perspective, redirect [its] phantasy to the real course of events."[596] What Kluge aims to produce, thus, is a *further* alienation intended to undo capitalist alienation.

Kluge's montage technique avoids the linear narratives of instrumental reason, as well as that sense of ahistoricity of the present reproduced by the logic of capitalism.[597] Kluge's early works still retain some narrative elements, but—rejecting the diegetical elements of Hollywood narration—he does not tell a single story but creates a "narrative surface," in order to exhibit all of the elements that constitute history and society: "Telling stories, this is precisely my conception of narrative cinema; and what else is the history of a country but the vastest narrative surface of all? Not one story but many

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[595] In 'Transparencies on Film,' Adorno speaks of the 'Oberhauseners' in reference to the group of filmmakers (led by Kluge) who signed the 'Oberhausen manifesto,' which led to the emergence of New German Cinema. See also Miriam Hansen, 'Introduction to Adorno, "Transparencies on Film",' *New German Critique*, No. 24/25, (Autumn, 1981 - Winter, 1982): 194-196.

[596] Kluge, 'On Film and the Public Sphere,' 44.

[597] Kluge, 'On Film and the Public Sphere,' 44: "When you look at an image of a factory, it is very difficult to distinguish between the ahistorical present and history."

stories," he writes.[598] In order to tell stories, but also to break with the reified patterns of thought and perception (taught, largely, by the culture industry) Kluge also introduces, as Liebman writes, "leaps and reversals of time ... reflection-inducing montage sequences." The filmmaker, he continues, "should use quotations, shifts in the mode of representation, interruptions calculated to break routinised, passive responses."[599]

Throughout the years, Kluge has radicalized that principle of montage. His early films *Yesterday Girl* (1966) or *Artists Under the Big Top: Perplexed* (1968), for example, seem today like fairly traditional films from a technical point of view, however relevant their themes—the impossibility of 'working through' the past, the weight of structural conditions on individuals, the impossible role of 'autonomous' artists, the conservatism of a love for art.[600] In later works like *The Assault of the Present on the Rest of Time* (1985), Kluge's use of montage was progressively radicalized, experimenting by not only juxtaposing images, but different stories, documentary and fictional work, adding captions, generating breaks in the diegesis through the use of devices like voice-overs or 'dissonant' music, to give a few examples. But it was not until one of his last films, *News From Ideological Antiquity: Marx/Eisenstein/Capital* (2008), that montage is taken to its limits, and becomes the central constructive device.[601]

In that work, montage finds its way even into the title, which somewhat misleadingly anticipates the 'theme' of the work: by juxtaposing the names of Marx and Eisenstein, two names that

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598 Kluge, 'On Film and the Public Sphere,' 33.

599 Liebman, 'Why Kluge?,' 14.

600 For an analysis of *Artists*, see Bray, 'Openness as a Form of Closure.' See also Habermas, 'The Useful Mole,' for an analysis of Anita G., the protagonist of *Yesterday Girl.*

601 See, e.g. Eugenia Roldan, 'Las contraesferas publicas de Kluge y Negt: experiencia, fantasia, utopia,' *Nomadas* 47, (October 2017): 76-77.

are not usually found together, Kluge is already inviting the audience to think, to generate expectations that—as with much of Kluge's work—will not be fulfilled. If pressed for an answer, one could broadly describe *News from Ideological Antiquity* as a 'filmic experiment' whose idea emerges from a diversity of encounters through different time periods. As the writer Dietmar Dath recounts in one of the final visual essays within *News*, the genesis of the idea behind the film comes from one encounter between James Joyce and Sergei Eisenstein—two crucial figures of 20th century art and revolutionary thought—who met in Paris in 1929 to think together the apparently unthinkable: taking to the screen Joyce's *Ulysses*. Eisenstein's true intention, however, was even greater—filming Marx's *Capital*. As Alan Pauls accounts, the meeting with Joyce made Eisenstein realize that those ideas were actually the same idea—one, however, that he did not concretize.[602]

Kluge came with the idea of resurfacing that project, whose sketches were found in a notebook from Eisenstein. But Kluge's task was much harder, since it implied 'filming' Marx's *Capital*, *and* doing it in the 21st century, when Marx's ideas have, on the one hand, been declared dead by some but, on the other, deemed as relevant as ever by others. The task implied realizing this project in an epoch when, nevertheless, the ruthless logic of neo-liberal capitalism seems to have left little room for the hope of a true historical social change. Added to that complication was the fact that Kluge's intentions were not simply to develop an aesthetic object, but had the political-emancipatory aim of making the ideas of Marx present (triggering an encounter between Marx and the contemporary audiences, as it

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602 Alan Pauls, 'El capital filmado por Alexander Kluge.' In http://proa.org/proacine/2011/08/01/el-capital-de-marx-filmado-por-alexander-kluge-por-alan-pauls/. Accessed September 2020. Eisenstein, however, did leave some notes on the Project, which appear later in Kluge's version. See also Fredric Jameson, 'Marx and Montage,' *New Left Review*, 58, (July – August, 2009).

were) so that through these ideas, individuals could redirect their fantasies and protest energies toward the conception of a new form of social organization.

To grasp the extent to which montage becomes the constructive principle of this film, it could be noted that even Kluge's role as the director of this film shows traces of a 'montage' as a principle. As Pauls notes, Kluge does not 'direct,' imposing his point of view, but acts more like a host.[603] In *News From Ideological Antiquity*, that is, Kluge does not affirm or guide, but takes a back seat and opens up a space where the 'guests' to this magnum 570 minute audio-visual project (from public intellectuals to musicians, filmmakers, theatre directors and performers) take the lead. The film becomes a play of free associations of ideas and thoughts that, like all of Kluge's work, leave the unprepared spectator baffled. Luigi Nono, Tom Tykwer, but also Benjamin, Brecht, Adorno, Rosa Luxemburg, are but some of the presences that permeate the screen.

No wonder why *News From Ideological Antiquity* has been described as more of a "platform" than a movie, where different texts, images and figures meet. Kluge's intention is not producing a 'text,' but a 'context.'[604] Self-defined as a 'gardener' of ideas, however, the context Kluge creates is one where seeds of thought are planted, where questions are raised; the work that comes after that is left for the spectator to do. "Nobody can learn not to learn," Anita G., the protagonist of *Yesterday Girl* says, in what could be another of Kluge's guiding principles, one that becomes apparent in *News*. The capacity to learn, as Langston writes, "can never be acquired from another person," but it does require "autonomy, maturity, and freedom from the tutelage of others, even from other knowledgeable people," as Kluge mentions.[605]

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603 Pauls, '"El Capital" de Marx filmado por Alexander Kluge.'

604 Pauls, '"El Capital" de Marx filmado por Alexander Kluge.'

605 Richard Langston, 'Toward an Ethics of Fantasy: The Kantian Dialogues of Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge,'

Unsurprisingly, many of Negt and Kluge's theoretical concepts and aesthetic devices are present throughout *News from Ideological Antiquity*. For example, the imperative to respect the knowledge of the viewer—while recognizing that such knowledge is yet to be articulated and turn into true autonomy—can be sensed in the way he carries forth the interviews with public intellectual figures such as Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Boris Groys, Peter Sloterdjik, Heiner Mueller, or with Negt himself. Kluge and Negt's anti-authoritarian thrust is embodied when Kluge adopts the tone of the Socratic teacher, a teacher who does not claim to possess knowledge or have the right answers. What Kluge does, instead, is leave the audience with more questions.

When speaking with Sloterdjik or Negt, the conversations run on, without any pre-planned set of questions or without editing the awkward silences or deviations from the topic—which are not so much deviations as free associations. A conversation about capitalism ends up with a discussion on Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, and to a question on commodity fetishism, Sloterdjik responds by referring to the practice of voodoo.[606] What is the connection between commodities and voodoo, between Marx's political economy and 'magic' practices, the audience is left wondering? In this case, montage plays in reverse: there is no editing of the interviews, undoing the "fetishism of meaning" of the usual television interview.[607] As Christian Schulte writes, this interview exemplifies many of Kluge's ideas and technical procedures:

> Kluge's conversations are stamped by the same combinatorics as his montage procedures, which arrange and rearrange the most disparate things in ever-new configurations. Two people are here engaged in a dialogue whose associative course is decided, not least, by

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The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory, 85:4, (2010): 282. The last quote is Negt and Kluge's.

[606] See Schulte, 'All Things are Enchanted Human Beings,' 413-414.

[607] Christian Schulte, 'Television and Obstinacy,' in *Alexander Kluge. Raw Materials*, 324.

> their mutual attentiveness and openness to influence. The topics discussed are divorced from their familiar semantic fields.[608]

Kluge's position has been rightly compared to that of the 'ignorant schoolmaster,' developed by Jacques Rancière, a position that presupposes a symmetry of knowledges between teacher and pupil.[609] Importantly, Kluge shares with Rancière a conception of the spectator as an active composer of the work itself. For Kluge, thus, the true film happens in the 'head of the spectator'—partly in the gaps left between images,[610] but also in the time in which the spectators turn away from the screen while, however, their capacities remain active. Describing this kind of active spectatorship, in words that could have been spoken by Kluge, Rancière writes:

> she observes, selects, compares, interprets. She links what she sees to a host of other things that she has seen on other stages, in other kinds of place. She composes her own poem with the elements of the poem before her.[611]

But for Kluge, the spectator sometimes needs a push, an invitation for further thought, as it were, because within a capitalist system, which is our current reality, appearances betray our senses, imagination is repressed, and memory is blocked (the memory of the labour that goes into commodity production, but also the memory that could trace back the history of oppressions and defeats). To undo the capitalist semblance of stasis, its fixing of meanings, Kluge's *News from Ideological Antiquity*

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[608] Schulte, 'All Things are Enchanted Human Beings,' 413.

[609] See Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. Kristin Ross (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991). Kluge and Negt's own image of a midwife comes to mind: "In order to allow it to pass through the birth canal, her grip must provoke the child's own movement." (HO, 96)

[610] See e.g. Huyssen, 'An Analytic Storyteller in the Course of Time,' 272.

[611] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 13.

tries to construct contexts where the imagination can bump into what the capitalist semblance of totality occludes.

This strategy is clearly performed in a short film-within-a-film directed by Tom Tykwer, 'The Human in the Thing.' Tykwer presents us with a frame in which we see nothing out of the ordinary, until he starts focusing on a diversity of objects present there—the street tiles, a piece of chewing gum, clothing, a house number, and so forth—and revealing their subjective component, their history:

> Brushed against the grain in this way, things suddenly stop seeming natural to us. Reflected in the perspective of their becoming, they are transformed into congealed history. They appear as the result of the work processes that have flowed into them to give them their form.[612]

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How successful is Kluge's *News from Ideological Antiquity*? At first, it might appear as if this film is just another modernist, heteronomous aesthetic object (if only presented in a new, mass medium). Moreover, it is not really clear whether, even in this case, Kluge has succeeded in subverting (either practically, or 'textually') the ruling ideologies and the dominant modes of representation. However, if we are to understand the social significance of this work by Kluge—which in this case, refers to its capacity to (substantially) generate a critical public and autonomous thought—we need to change the terms of the question, and focus in the context of its reception.

The question thus becomes: How successful is Kluge's work in constructing a 'proletarian' public sphere? If we follow his and Negt's account, the true emancipatory potential of a work of art would then need to be looked-at from *outside* the film's formal properties. The emancipatory power of

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[612] Schulte, 'All Things are Enchanted Human Beings,' 413.

the aesthetic, and this case is no exception, can only be realized, according to them, in the interaction between the work and the public it constructs. It is there, through the context it generates, where 'success' should be measured, and where the significance of Kluge's works can be found. The reformulated question takes the focus away from *News from Ideological Antiquity*, as a single item, to Kluge's aesthetic praxis as a whole—where *News* is but a part within a broader aesthetic, public, and political context.

Kluge's (political) success should therefore be measured vis-à-vis the capacity of the discussed film (and of his other works) to *construct* their audience as a critical public. At first sight, however, even in this case it might appear as if Kluge's work is unsuccessful. This is because, as it has been claimed, Kluge seems to be preaching to the converted. While theoretically his aim is to puzzle the viewer/reader through fragmentation and montage, it seems that those devices have become common-places which no longer 'shock.' What is more, it could also be argued that (contrary to his intentions) Kluge's works are presupposing previous knowledge. To grasp the truth behind a Kluge film such as *News*, e.g., one would have to be able to grasp the multiple references and connotations (to poetry, to historical facts, to philosophical concepts), further limiting its potential audience. This is something Kluge himself acknowledges, and has led critics to claim that, in Lutze's words, "Kluge makes films only for a select group of his peers, Germans of his age and educational background. For almost everybody else, the films may be too chaotic to organize."[613] Kluge, thus, could be 'accused' of creating works more streamlined to Adorno's aesthetic demands, than to the ones he and Negt formulate.

[613] Lutze, *Alexander Kluge*, 166.

Yet, it would seem that analyzing his work in those terms is already mistaken, since it reads it vis-à-vis its truth content, and not (to go back to Wellmer) in relation to its truth potential. The above interpretation, thus, fails to actually take the concrete audiences and the context of reception into consideration. This is not to say that there is no value in studying Kluge's work *qua* isolated aesthetic objects, or in theorizing Kluge's multi-media practice as a model for a future authorship and aesthetic production. But I would insist that, in line with the argument developed throughout this work, this has to be at the very least complemented with a study of their impact and reception. If one is willing to speak of the *emancipatory* power of the aesthetic, then the analysis cannot be performed in a vacuum, but must be located within a social and historical context and in relation to its public(s). [614]

In those terms, I would argue that Kluge's works have been successful—yet, this implies thinking outside the box when considering *who* constitutes the audience of a film, how is its context built.[615] In the case of Kluge's *News*, the audience, I would argue, must be conceived of as including all of those engaged and getting together to discuss, interpret, or view this work (and thus as transcending the spatial and temporary limitations of the cinema theatre or television screen.) Whether because its subject matter—Marx and Eisenstein's 'cult' status seems to be always appealing to young audiences around the world—or because of the appeal that the name 'Alexander Kluge' itself seems

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[614] This issue is pressing because, even while Kluge's aesthetic practice has been gaining prominence in academic and scholarly circles, the question of its political role has (mostly) fallen by the wayside. So while studies *are* now being published on Kluge, most of these take him as a modernist writer/filmmaker/artist, and have focused on studying his works *qua* aesthetic monads. I would highlight as some of the latest exemplars of this trend Matthew Miller's *The German Epic in the Cold War: Peter Weiss, Uwe Johnson, and Alexander Kluge*, (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2018); and Philipp Ekardt's *Toward Fewer Images: The Work of Alexander Kluge*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2018). Admittedly, I myself have at moments fallen into that trap when analyzing Kluge's aesthetic theory.

[615] How to actually measure the extent of this success is clearly a question that transcends the scope of this work, but would probably require performing a series of empirical and sociological studies.

to have gained, *News from Ideological Antiquity* has, in that regard, gained an audience that transcends the intellectual 'Ivory Tower' of German scholarship.

Evidence for this can be found in the number of views pirated copies of *News* have on streaming platforms like YouTube;[616] or in the fact that Kluge's films have been screened in festivals and special cycles not only in Germany or the United States, but also in Madrid, Barcelona, in Argentina—countries for which Kluge's concern with German history might, at first sight, not have much to say. In those festivals, intellectuals, indeed, but also students, movie-goers and simple film aficionados have engaged in discussing and sharing their experiences. There is also the number of (not necessarily scholarly) articles and reviews that have been written on it.

All of the above (not to mention Kluge's other works) forms part of the context that surrounds Kluge's *News*, and, arguably, *around this context*, a public (however weak or cohesive is hard to tell) of critical individuals has begun to emerge. Kluge's film, in itself, might not achieve what it sets out to do theoretically (or when it does, this does not necessarily mean it does so in virtue of Kluge's principles). Perhaps Kluge's own aesthetic praxis, which tends more toward the modernism he criticises (and is thus not always faithful to the experiences of the oppressed), is not even the answer to the problems highlighted in his works with Negt. But, once the film is studied in relation to its public and its context, it cannot be considered a failure.

Kluge's aesthetic contributions do not end when or where his films or books do. Rather, just like in his invitations for the spectator to think beyond the time-frame of the screen or the materiality of the text, Kluge himself goes 'outside'—into the public sphere—to discuss his works with students or with other intellectuals, prolonging his public interventions, planting more questions that invite

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[616] Kluge himself has uploaded parts of the film in his own 'Garden of Information,' and it is also partially found in Cornell University's website.

critical thought. The film in the spectator's head, thus, is not constructed only in the gaps left inside the aesthetic objects, but also on those gaps that authors—acting as counter-producers—open up in the hegemonic public sphere. Leslie Adelson, for example, accounts how, after an invitation to speak at a conference on his work taking place in Cornell University, Kluge was not only happy to contribute to the discussion, but decided to produce (or rather, to 'counter-produce') several short films specially made for television.[617] Similarly, Kluge keeps on publishing, not only his stories, but also pieces of journalism—on Trump's election, on the ongoing pandemic—that, while perhaps not 'theoretically' correct or comprehensible, have triggered public debate.[618] Seemingly, Kluge himself has become a piece of 'proletarian' art that goes beyond his particular products.

I would like to close, then, with some words by Lessing which—Habermas suggests—are a suitable description of Kluge's aesthetic and political intentions:

> My thoughts may seem less and less coherent, indeed they may even seem to contradict each other: but they are no more than thoughts in which they (the readers, the audience) may find material for their own thinking. My intention is only to sow *fermenta cognitionis*.[619]

Seeds of knowledge—i.e. invitations to think critically, to have self-trust, seeds that produce critical experience—are precisely what a 'proletarian' artist needs to create in order to contribute to rebuilding the public sphere. And this is what Kluge's *News From Ideological Antiquity* (as well as his other aesthetic

[617] Those 'minute' films were projected at Cornell in 2018, and can be found at https://vod.video.cornell.edu/channel/channelid/106742121.

[618] See, e.g., Alexander Kluge, 'Charisma of the Drunken Elephant. A short story about Donald Trump,' *Frieze*, November 22, 2016. https://www.frieze.com/article/charisma-des-betrunkenen-elefanten. See also Carla Imbrogno, (interview) 'Alexander Kluge. "Estamos viviendo la hora cero, como en 1945",' *Revista Ñ*, May 5, 2020. https://www.clarin.com/revista-enie/ideas/alexander-kluge-viviendo-hora-cero-1945-_0_jWWlPy3cn.html.

[619] Lessing, cited in In Habermas, 'The Useful Mole,' 112.

and theoretical interventions) have done. In so doing, Kluge's work, and his own public persona, have contributed to the consciousness-raising process, a central part of the constitution of a 'proletarian' public sphere.

Concluding Remarks

Given the texture of today's societies, cultural pluralism cannot be taken as a mere epiphenomenon. The multiplication and strengthening of self-conscious and politically engaged social constituencies (i.e. of counter-public spheres) and their expressions of dissent or indignation are no mere accidents and, contrary to Adorno's diagnosis, these have not all been absorbed by capitalism—not all transmuted, turned into "an instrument of economic development, spreading standardization and making lives into fiction."[620] But it would be mistaken to see this pluralism as a sign of the weakening of capitalism. The social organizing logic is still capitalist: a logic that functions automatically, without regard for the interests and needs of its subjects, and whose hegemony is felt everywhere.

Notably, then, neither the 'persistence of resistance' nor the proliferation of counter-publics implies that the problems and contradictions of capitalism have been transcended. Structural oppression is, indeed, still present, even if its contradictions now express themselves in different dimensions. The capitalization of society is still growing, even if it now affects social groups through vectors that are not limited to the economic. That, in spite of this, resistance and critique have persisted, however, should lead critical theorists to avoid falling into the pessimism that characterized Adorno's thought. It should also tell us that we need not be content with a limited 'democratization'—one that, e.g., Habermas' work tends to call for. Further, in view of the multiple dimensions on which oppression is expressed, and if it is to keep alive the possibility of a radical social change, critical theory has to look beyond 'traditional' politics. Arguably, counter-public spheres are one of the sites where we should turn our attention to.

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[620] Honneth, 'Organized Self-Realization,' 474.

The above should at least point toward the timeliness of Negt and Kluge's work, which I have reconstructed as an attempt to synthesize some of Adorno's and Habermas' insights, and in so doing, transcend (some of) their limitations. Today, neither a socio-philosophical account that turns its back on the actuality of social and political movements (as Adorno's), nor one that fails to call for a radical structural transformation of capitalism (such as Habermas') will suffice to keep Critical Theory's emancipatory intent and its relation to praxis alive. In this vein, a remark by Andrew Bowie—one of the first commentators to take seriously Negt and Kluge's theoretical and aesthetic work—is germane:

> if nothing can suggest the potential available beyond the dominant forms of exchange on the economic level, then Critical Theory simply must stagnate. Negt and Kluge have attempted the risky undertaking of tracing the history of those stubborn components of subjectivity that now verges on being buried both by new material and theoretical developments.[621]

My reconstruction of Negt and Kluge's work on labour capacities and on the public sphere aims to expose the value of such an undertaking. I have therefore highlighted, with Negt and Kluge, the limits and the potentials of particularist forms of resistance, which are encountered in the form of material reactions and crystallized within counter-public spheres. I have also shown that the possibility to reconstruct the social horizon of experience (i.e. to build a 'proletarian' public sphere) is still alive.

Notwithstanding the merits of Negt and Kluge's critical theory, it should be mentioned that their undertaking *is* a risky one, as Bowie comments above. In order to point toward the limits of Negt and Kluge's work, but also to open up new paths of inquiry for future research, below I address (and provide a tentative justification) to what seems to me is the most contentious issue in their theory: the

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[621] Bowie, '*Geschichte und Eigensinn*,' 190.

reliance on (what I have called) a 'negative' anthropology in order to ground their account of resistance. I then close with some reflections on the potential use-value of their work, and point toward the need for a contemporary critical theory of the public sphere.

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In order to ground the 'persistence of resistance,' Negt and Kluge's work relies, as we have seen, on certain 'natural' laws or capacities (such as fantasy or self-regulation) that retain their objectivity vis-à-vis historical developments. In short, the objectivity of 'nature' seems to be necessary for their account to even take off. Negt and Kluge could, thus, be accused of appealing to essential capacities, or of calling for a return to nature, to an unleashing of libidinal forces. Yet, I believe that there is an (Adornian-inspired) way around this.

For Negt and Kluge, indeed, there is a 'materialist' or 'natural' instinct that is tied to the fact that human beings are living, material beings. It survives 'beneath' history, as it were, and is the basis of—as Adorno would put it—the "demand for life that is right."[622] This, however, should not be taken to mean that nature is construed by Negt and Kluge as an ontological base or essence, nor that they depend on a scientific, physical understanding of nature. Rather, nature should be understood as that "objectivity" that 'stands against' the subject, as Andrew Bowie suggests vis-à-vis Adorno's use of the concept. Differently put, it refers to those material feelings or impulses which the subject (however historically mediated) cannot avoid sensing.[623] The way this objectivity (Negt and Kluge call it

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[622] Theodor Adorno, *Metaphysics: Concepts and Problems*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), 182. Or as Adorno famously writes: "The physical moment tells our knowledge that suffering ought not to be, that things should be different." (ND, 203)

[623] Andrew Bowie, *Adorno and the Ends of Philosophy*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), 76-77.

obstinacy) manifests itself, however, is (like the subject) always already historically mediated. As Negt and Kluge remind us, human subjects are, ultimately, social constructions.[624]

Indeed, I would suggest that their work could be productively used to expose the problems of 'over-historicizing' the human subject.[625] In short, with Negt and Kluge, one could argue that historical oppression makes no sense if its counter-pole, nature, disappears.[626] As Peter Dews writes, without an account of what power molds, or of what history represses, "it is impossible to reckon the costs imposed by 'an infinitesimal power over the active body', or the sacrifice involved in the 'individualizing fragmentation of labour power.'"[627] For Negt and Kluge, there must be *something* that the logic of capitalism abstracts from, *something* that it oppresses (or represses). Negt and Kluge's appeal to the material substratum of the human subject, further, could also evidence the problem of playing freedom against nature, something that has led to the repression of the latter—to catastrophic results. This should at least suggest that Negt and Kluge's appeal to material, self-regulating protest energies is not necessarily problematic, nor should it be understood as an essentializing of certain traits or capacities.

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Let me return, by way of conclusion, to the other (political) pole of Negt and Kluge's work: the concept of the 'proletarian' public sphere. The construction of such a 'proletarian' public sphere, according to Negt and Kluge, will have to start from the daily experiences of social suffering; from

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624 "The cultivation of the five senses is the work of all previous history" they often repeat with Marx. (PSE, 153-154) See also Negt, in 'The History of Living Labor Power,' 39: 'Nowadays, the Kantian question, "What is a human being?," can no longer be answered without reference to the theory of capital.'

625 This is suggested by Negt in 'The History of Living Labor Power,' 47-48.

626 And this is something Adorno recognized when speaking of the dialectic of nature and history. (ND, 354-357)

627 Dews, 'Power and Subjectivity in Foucault,' 90.

the needs, fantasies, and interests of marginalized and alienated subjects. The question they attempt to answer is *whether* and *how* this starting point can lead subjects to produce their own experiences, and thereby to (re)construct autonomously their social norms, values, and institutions. Giving an answer is pressing, since the alternative is that subjects' capacities and the products of their (physical, cognitive, imaginative) labour remain appropriated by a social system that lives on human alienation and which blocks their self-realization. The alternative, that is, is for subjects to keep performing balancing acts that, instead of materially satisfying their needs, allow them to merely keep on living. Only if individuals become aware that it is in their hands to change the conditions that make them alienated, and if they manage to cooperate and act collectively to change them, as Negt and Kluge would argue, can a real historical social change take place. Only then would a 'proletarian' public sphere—as the social horizon of experience produced by a *self-conscious* and *global* subject—be realized.

Under present circumstances, the flourishing of counter-public spheres and social movements (e.g. feminism, the Black liberation movement, the struggle against global warming) appear as a silver lining. The proliferation and growing impact of these movements—which have gone beyond an isolated critique and have (many times) come together to question and contest the logic of capitalism—should give reason to think that the oppressed and alienated subjects *are* struggling for their autonomy, and for the possibility to construct their own social horizon of experience and their own history. It should also give reason to consider the work of Negt and Kluge—whose pioneering account of counter-publicity has been largely overlooked—as a worthy asset for a critical theory attempting to unearth the emancipatory potential within today's capitalist societies.

Crucially, then, my reconstruction of Negt and Kluge's work calls for the further development of a critical theory of counter-publicity. In line with their work, a careful study of the development of these counter-public spheres would, for example, have to show how the process of producing a 'proletarian' public sphere can take place. Similarly, the role that theoretical and aesthetic 'labour' can

perform vis-à-vis this process would also have to be assessed. And I would suggest that the feminist movement could function as a case study that could test (and complement) Negt and Kluge's account of the public sphere—and relatedly, of the emancipatory power of the aesthetic. I close with some provisional remarks in this regard that are intended to open paths for future study.

The transformation of the women's movement—from a struggle to gain legal rights to an anti-capitalist movement—and the way this movement has managed to learn from its mistakes (thereby avoiding, e.g., being seamlessly absorbed by the seductive appeal of neo-liberalism), point to the fact that, for one, individuals will not-so-easily allow their interests and needs to be shaped heteronomously. This could lead to an analysis of the role of the 'consciousness industry' vis-à-vis the development of a feminist consciousness. Further, a study of the relation between feminism's political activism and intellectual labour, but also of the uses and (mis)uses of aesthetic devices, could also be performed relying on Negt and Kluge's account of the 'emancipatory power' of art and culture. The genesis of a feminist consciousness (*qua* oppositional consciousness) in relation to what I have called a 'proletarian' consciousness would also be worth studying. Empirically at least, it seems that what emerged from the need to communicate and to gain self-understanding, to construe one's own identity—in short, from women's own experiences of oppression—has developed into a complex awareness of the need and the possibilities to transform a society that is structurally oppressive—and not only for women, but also for everyone whose 'products' confront them in an alienated manner.

In line with the above, I believe that Negt and Kluge's work could help understand feminism's radical potential, something that cannot be done by measuring it in terms of whether feminism (*qua* social movement) has managed to radically transform the structures of capitalist, bourgeois societies.[628]

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[628] Measured in those terms, there is no social group or counter-public which can emphatically be said to have (yet) succeeded. Not, e.g., the Civil Rights movement in America, nor the advances that have happened for the working

To measure the success of feminism in building a 'proletarian' public sphere requires, instead, conceiving it as an ongoing process of world-disclosure and consciousness raising that can push individuals toward an awareness of the structural dimensions of oppression. Seen from this perspective (opened-up by Negt and Kluge's work), feminism has succeeded. Succeeded, that is, insofar as it has allowed many individuals to transform their consciousness, becoming aware of the possibility to end alienation and to recover a full experience.

The 'proletarian' public sphere, as a radically different social horizon of experience, will not emerge out of the blue, nor will it emerge from institutional changes. A *truly rational* social change requires, first, that the forms of experience begin to change, that they develop from 'below,' that is, following the subjects' own schemas. Contemporary social movements such as feminism are a proof that these developments are still happening, and show that constructing a 'proletarian' public sphere is a living possibility. But they also teach us—in a lesson Negt and Kluge are keen to emphasise—that for its construction, we must begin to search for the sites of potential struggle outside of the factory, outside of the hegemonic public sphere, and turn toward those undervalued—but hence, also underestimated—sites, struggles, and capacities.

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class within capitalist democracies could be counted as victories.

Appendix: The Obstinate Child

Once upon a time there was a stubborn child who never did what his mother told him to do. The dear Lord, therefore, did not look kindly upon him and let him become sick. No doctor could cure him, and in a short time, he lay on his deathbed. After he was lowered into his grave and was covered over with earth, one of his little arms suddenly emerged and reached up into the air. They pushed it back down and covered the earth with fresh earth, but that did not help. The little arm kept popping out. So the child's mother had to go to the grave her- self and smack the little arm with a switch. After she had done that, the arm withdrew, and then, for the first time, the child had peace beneath the earth.[629]

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[629] Jacob W. Grimm and Wilhelm K. Grimm, "The Stubborn Child," in *Complete Fairy Tales*, trans. Jack Zipes, (Westminster: Bantam Books, 1992), 422. In HO, 292. Negt and Kluge comment: "No other collection of fairy tales contains such a thematic core. Obstinacy is what stubbornly continues to have an effect well beyond the grave. It cannot be killed, nor does it die. It merely withdraws itself inward." (HO, 511)

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