Out Come the Wolves: On the need to destroy nature

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Abstract

This dissertation will evaluate the distinction between nature and history, as well as the distinction between human nature and culture. The intention is to demonstrate, through both dialectical philosophy and contemporary scientific research, that climate change is currently articulated in such a way that perpetuates the impossibility of even thinking of a solution. Beginning with an exposition of the dialectic, I will then demonstrate the way that history is nature, and how nature is history. From this I will focus specifically on the notion of self-preservation and the way that it appears as inescapably and naturally individualistic. The self-preservation instinct cannot exist if it is not mediated through society, and my intention is to show how the individualistic sheen on self-preservation is both a product and necessary component of contemporary society. The mediation of the self-preservation instinct through capitalist society both perpetuates climate change and prevents individuals from doing anything other than participating in their own demise. From here I will turn to Walter Benjamin and his essay *Der destruktive Charakter.* I want to re-evaluate this essay in order to show how destruction is posited as an emancipatory force, and how the destructive character is a revolutionary subject. The final and concluding chapter will bring the dissertation together to argue that the only way to prevent climate change, the only chance for true emancipation, is the destruction of nature.

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Contents

Introduction

The questions that children ask of adults, questions that get answered with empty gestures towards some wisdom that will come with age, should guide philosophical thinking. 'You'll understand when you're older,' is a response that presumes eternal life. Conflating aging with thinking will only repeat the idea that 'life is not fair,' an idea that is both an apology for the status quo and a desperate attempt to quell the memory of a time when there were no naïve questions. Insisting upon a return to the brazen inquisitiveness of children is not the same as using such inquisitiveness as a *model* for philosophy. Returning to a child-like inquisitiveness calibrates thinking. Returning to naïveté is to take seriously a curiosity dampened by a culture of pragmatism, a culture that says that there is no time to dwell on such thinking. Dissatisfaction with any short-hand answer and frustration at how every explanation leads to more questions, should permeate all philosophical enquiry. On the other hand, persistent inquisitiveness must not be given such privilege that it blinds thinking to the difference between the truth of the matter and the satisfaction at hearing that truth. Although a question might appear grammatically sound, focused, relevant, and informed, the very conditions that give rise to it might make any pleasing or coherent answer impossible. Dissatisfaction with the truth is not a reason to circumvent it. Demanding ever-new answers to a problem that will not go away might simply obfuscate the problem itself. In this dissertation, I will be asking two naïve questions that appear to be impossible to answer.

The first question can be summarised as follows: 'why is it that technologically advanced capitalist societies continue to engage in activities that they *know* are making the planet inhospitable for human life?' The appearance that this question is impossible to answer comes from many places. One place is the agonisingly pertinent question that usually follows and then nullifies any given answer: 'so what do we do about it?' The inability to answer this question taints the answer to the former. Part of my project will be an attempt to disentangle the question that I clearly set myself the task of answering from the one that usually follows. In doing so, I hope to show that the question might not be impossible to answer after all. The problem might rather be that any answer given, regardless of how true it might be, does not necessarily lend itself at all to anything like a solution, or at least a solution that is within our grasp. In order for me to answer this question, I will need to formulate it in such a way that it comes together with the second question that I will be asking myself: 'what is nature?' This

question appears to be equally impossible to answer. The appearance of impossibility that shrouds this question comes from a different place than the previous. Over the centuries that this question has been asked, countless answers have been given. The sheer saturation of answers that we find from past texts might prompt us to turn towards the self-proclaimed certainty of the new sciences. But even there the division of labour has sliced knowledge into so many pieces that the question 'what is nature?' returns nothing but the feeling that perhaps the question itself is somehow incorrect. As Hegel once said, this question can always be asked but never completely answered.[1]

My conviction is that only by trying to answer both questions simultaneously, rather than separately in the same paper, can anything like an answer can be formulated. And for the most part my answer will not be saying anything new. Karl Marx expressed the ideas that will be found in this dissertation over a hundred and fifty years ago.[2] Around 1915, György Lukács returned to the ideas that Marx developed.[3] The Frankfurt School then picked them up, most notably in the work of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer.[4] And still today, many theories share at their core the same arguments posed by Marx all that time ago. The conditions that prevent genuine emancipation are, in a great many ways, the same today as they were over a century ago. To be precise, the *deprivation,* rather than genuine scarcity, of the things required to sustain bare life continues to be a structuring principle of society. For technologically advanced countries, self-preservation has been made easy, but this active and deliberate deprivation renders self-preservation to be a fundamental influence on the activity of the population. Having said all this, one might wonder why I would even bother trying to rethink these questions. I would respond by insisting that by not returning to the themes examined by the philosophers mentioned above I would fail as a philosopher. The problem of what Lukács

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[1] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature,* 3 Vols. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1970), Vol. 1, p. 194.

[2] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 'The German Ideology', in *Marx & Engels Collected Works,* 50 Vols. (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), Vol. 5, pp. 19-539 (p. 28f).

[3] György Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1971), p. 62.

[4] Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 4-12.

called 'second nature' is not that it is an exhausted concept, nor that it is outdated. The problem is that the revolutionary spark requires constant fanning. 'Second nature' is a phantom that can only be known through the disturbances it leaves behind.[5] Philosophical enquiry must not rest on its laurels, it must work constantly to expose the ways in which ideology embeds itself in the changing formations of society.

I will begin this dissertation by looking at the dialectic as expressed in the work of Adorno, a version of the dialectic that he termed 'negative dialectics'. The importance of returning the method, if the dialectic could ever really be called a method as such, is the need to eliminate any misreading of my argument. Because one can never gain immediate access to the world, and because the very idea that immediacy is intrinsically superior to mediation, I think that an exposition of the strength of the dialectic will serve to support the rest of the dissertation. The key elements that I wish to draw out are, firstly, the way that the dialectic refuses to compromise the truth of the matter to conform to pre-established concepts. If a conclusion appears contradictory, this may well be an expression of the matter at hand rather than a problem with the method. Secondly, I want to establish the way that the dialectic is a part of reality itself, rather than a standalone method to be used in understanding reality. I will be implementing the dialectic throughout this dissertation, moving from the grand notion of the constitution of an entire ecosystem, down to the minute detail of the translation of a single word in a text. This movement between particular and universal is an attempt to draw out possibilities and illuminate the shadows cast by reified concepts.

I will use the first chapter as a platform to show, as Adorno argued, the way that nature at its most natural is history, and history at its most historical is nature. That which appears immutable is often an appearance that masks the contingency of life. The historical struggles and developments that produce society are covered over by the objects of that society. Natural laws are blind to their social origin, and so too are social laws blind to their natural origin. This chapter will show how nature is both physically and ideologically a product of human activity and history.

The following chapter will focus on one such natural law: self-preservation. Its presence in the natural world obfuscates the contingent forces that actively retain self-preservation as a structuring principle. To focus the argument even more, I will only examine the need for food,

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[5] Lukács, pp. 63-65.

conscious of the fact that food alone is not enough to sustain life. By focussing on food, I hope to demonstrate a way of thinking that can be applied to other things, such as water, medicine, shelter, love, and education. Food is no longer scarce. Globally, enough food is produced to feed the world's population twice over, and yet millions of people starve to death or live hand to mouth. I intend to show how this happens and how it appears inevitable in contemporary society. But the purpose of this chapter is to show that by forcing people to live according to the principle of self-preservation, by forcing people to think about their *immediate* and *bodily* needs, the future becomes pitch black. In this blackness, climate change thunders on. Individuals are not ignorant to climate change, nor are they apathetic, but because they are forced to think about their immediate needs, and the situation is presented as natural and inevitable, they are unable to act any other way.

Once I have shown the way that even the instinct for self-preservation is distinctly historical, I want to move from Adorno to Benjamin. Benjamin's essay *Der destruktive Charakter* is a brilliant flash of insight into the emancipatory power of destruction. I will first examine the notion of 'Darstellung' as found in the original German text. The English translations of Benjamin's text give the impression that Darstellung is an image for an individual, an apparition or vision of sorts. I want to show how the destructive character is not a subjective position, it is not a way of thinking or an outlook on life. I want to show how the notion of Darstellung is distinctly dialectical. To be specific, Darstellung is an embodied *and* historical notion. With this in mind I will then detail my reading of Benjamin's essay. I will argue that destruction is not a negative thing. I will argue that in a culture that makes impossible the prevention of climate change, destruction is an act that razes to the ground the structures that prevent people from doing anything other than perpetuating their own demise. If self-preservation is social and historical, is maintained through human systems, then these systems must be destroyed if we are to achieve true emancipation.

The final chapter will bring the threads of my thinking together to show how the contemporary practice of Rewilding expresses a latent potential for the Darstellung of the destructive character. I will examine a real example of a Rewilding project in order to show how the Benjaminian notion of destruction operates. Ecological conservation projects seek to maintain an ecosystem. They seek to control the changes in such a way that preserve the most current image of nature. In doing so, they do not allow nature to act spontaneously, they do not allow nature to emerge on its own terms. As the previous chapters will have shown, nature is historical, and conservation projects are not neutral in their efforts to maintain the status quo.

Rewilding seeks to destroy the nature that conservationists are trying to maintain. By reintroducing extinct species, by tearing down fences, by stopping the strict management of the land, the old image of nature is completely destroyed as an alternative one emerges. Rewilding does not seek to *re-establish* past instances of nature, but allows nature to flourish on its own terms. I want to show how this mode of destruction has huge potential politically. A huge amount of destruction could come about through something as gentle as the guarantee of food. If people are *aware* of the looming danger but unable to act any differently because they must continually seek basic sustenance, I think that the guarantee of this sustenance will open up a space for possibility, a space for something else to flourish. My conclusions are unrealistic. However, this essay is both an exercise in demonstrating my ability to analyse and critique certain mode of thinking, as well as an exercise in thinking beyond there merely given, beyond the limits that pragmatism and convention insist cannot be surpassed. To do this is an expression of freedom.

I

"The separation of subject and object is both real and semblance."[6]

A philosophical text must have a beginning. This limit, however, does not plague philosophical enquiry. The demand for a secure beginning, for *prima philosophia*, is an attempt to guarantee certainty before thinking is allowed to proceed. But this security is like that of a hazmat suit; thinking can explore without the risk of contamination. The security is an attempt to ensure that thinking and the object intended by thought ultimately remain separate. Such an approach to philosophical enquiry rubs very closely to arrogance. It assumes that a position can, and should, be taken up on the outside, that proper analysis requires a neutral and speculative distance. The arrogance of such thinking says that only those capable of removing themselves from the object entirely, only those who are not tainted with the dirt of the world, are capable of knowing the world. The desire that pushes one to find security of a *prima philosophia* is the same that produces a watered-down reading of the dialectic. This chapter will be dedicated to explaining the dialectic in order to establish that the dialectic is more than a mere *weltanschauung* and more than just one method among many.

Thesis, Antithesis, Synthesis, or, how not to think dialectically

The dialectic under examination in this dissertation is that which emerges from the philosophy of Hegel. Specifically, this dissertation will be examining the version of the dialectic that Adorno termed 'negative dialectics'. This essay is not the place to examine the differences between the two, but suffice to say here that the eventual culmination of Spirit in Hegel's dialectic renders that culmination to be always already a part of every movement. Negative dialectics, however, as we shall see, maintains the critical force of the dialectic without insisting on a movement towards a *final* synthesis. A very common misreading of the

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[6] Theodor W. Adorno, 'On Subject and Object', in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 245-258 (p. 246).

dialectic can be abbreviated into the infamous schema, 'Thesis, Antithesis, Synthesis'. This schema, however, cannot be found in the work of Hegel except for in a single line that reproaches Kant for having "everywhere posited thesis, antithesis, synthesis."[7] Hegel stresses that the "triadic form" becomes something lifeless, a mere shadow, when reduced to a formalised schema.[8] Two mistakes follow from such a misreading of Hegel. The first is the idea that the dialectic is a strict *a priori* method to be laid upon the world in order to extract knowledge. Hegel is clear that thinking must make every effort to approach the object as it is. Thinking must reach out to the object by trying to shed any pre-given concepts, such as Object, Cause, Universal, etc.[9] Thesis, Antithesis, and Synthesis are such concepts. The second mistake assumes that the dialectic brings together two opposing elements that stand externally to one another in an attempt to create one single entity. This mistake understands the dialectic as a kind of mediator in a dispute. A proposition is brought forward, and an opposing proposition is held against it. A calculation is then made that intends to preserve the characteristics that are shared by both propositions in an attempt solve the tension.[10] The Synthesis would be a kind of compromise between two feuding parties. In his demonstration of the dialectic at the beginning of *Logic*, Hegel clearly shows how such a reading is mistaken. Being is not held up as a complete, self-contained entity against its already existing opposite, Nothingness. An examination of the notion of Being, an exploration of Being *on its own terms*, reveals that "*pure being and pure nothing are (...) the same.*"[11]

The immanence of this procedure is of great importance in the dialectic. If we recall Hegel's demand that thinking must try to reach beyond predefined concepts towards the object itself we can get a picture of how the dialectic operates. If one were to declare that 'X is a

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[7] Walter Arnold Kaufmann, *Hegel, a Reinterpretation* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978), p. 154.

[8] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Arnold V. Miller and J N. Findlay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 29.

[9] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 30.

[10] Theodor W. Adorno, *An introduction to dialectics*, trans. Christoph Ziermann, ed. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), pp. 54-55.

[11] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. George Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 59.

human being', we have what appears to be a straightforward claim. In logical terms, we are dealing with the formula 'A=B'. But a problem immediately emerges once we realise that 'A' is not equal to 'B'. 'B' is a universal category. At the same time, there is something about 'A', something that renders it to be a particular rather than a universal, which cannot be attributed to 'B'. 'A' is simultaneously more *and* less than 'B'. The shorthand 'A=B' is an equation that treats all the distinct characteristics that differentiate 'A' from 'B' as identical. There is a zero-sum game that ignores difference for the sake of pragmatism and elegance.[12] If we return to the proposition 'X is a human being', any individual that we might think of will possess characteristics that do not fit into the concept 'human being'. One might respond by subsuming this individual into the concept 'human being' so that the characteristics that used to render the individual different from the concept 'human being', are now a part of that concept. This subsumption, however, would force the concept 'human being' to include everything that the individual is not, that is, the characteristics of other individuals that they do not share. And so, the individual would not do justice to the emphatic concept 'human being' and would once again become a mere particular of a universal concept. The actual, living individual and the concept 'human being' would remain non-identical. There is a contradiction immanent to the concept 'human being', a contradiction that says simultaneously that 'X is a human being' and that 'there are no human beings'.[13] The task of philosophy is not to eliminate contradiction through some *a priori* schema, but neither is it to *assume* that contradiction will emerge from any enquiry.[14] The task of philosophy is to accept that the categories of thought brought to any enquiry, including the principle of noncontradiction, newness, elegance, linearity, are not identical to the object.[15] As we shall see later, the concept of causality is a particularly dogmatic concept that remains totally blind to the fact that it is a product of thought imposed upon the world.[16] One should note that the example 'X is a human being' used here to explain the dialectic is itself an example of this movement between particular and universal: "X is an

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[12] Adorno, *An introduction to dialectics*, p. 68.

[13] Adorno, *An introduction to dialectics*, p. 69.

[14] Adorno, *An introduction to dialectics*, p. 67.

[15] Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics,* trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1983), p. 5.

[16] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 233.

example of the dialectic." Another thing to note is the way that the distance between thought and the world is mediated through thought itself.[17] Thinking must reach beyond pre-given categories, must reach beyond thought to that which is not thought. This paradox, this *impossibility*, is what drives the dialectic.

Getting straight to the matter

Many schools of thought attempt to circumnavigate this paradox by appealing to a crude materialism. The hard sciences, such as physics and neuroscience, are clear examples. In physics, the problem with defining a 'human being' is quickly dismissed because a 'human being', just like the entire universe, is merely a collection of subatomic particles and different forces. For example, current research tries to explain human consciousness as a quantum material. Mathematical formulas are drawn up that attempt to show the changes in quantum states when an observer makes a distinction between two objects, despite the fact that the two objects are inseparably linked as part of the same system.[18] Another area of research claims that human consciousness can be explained as the quantum spin of the phosphate ion.[19] In neuroscience, the Connectome project sets out to create a computer model of the human brain. In short, the project uses the scans taken from thousands of human brains and documents the information about the location and activity of each neuron. This data is then used to create a digital map. Proponents of the project claim that computer models of the brain can determine a wide range of illnesses and hereditary diseases, as well as the intelligence of a person.[20] The determination of intelligence is based on the "efficiency of the functional connectivity of local

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[17] Adorno, *An introduction to dialectics*, p. 70.

[18] Max Tegmark, 'Consciousness as a state of matter', *Chaos, Solitons & Fractals*, 76 (2015), pp. 238-270.

[19] Matthew P.A. Fisher, 'Quantum cognition: The possibility of processing with nuclear spins in the brain', *Annals of Physics*, 362 (2015), pp. 593-602.

[20] Olaf Sporns, 'The human connectome: a complex network', *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1224.1 (2011), pp. 109-125.

neighbourhood clusters of neurons."[21] Consciousness, intelligence, personality, reason, the human mind, are explained as merely the cause of neurons communicating through a network of informational impulses.

A turn towards pure matter, towards a bare materiality, ultimately fails both in explaining the world and in avoiding the deadlock between mind and matter. In Adorno's words, we are trapped within a prison of language:

> The peculiarity of the concept of ὕλη, or matter, is that we are here using a concept or speaking of a principle which, by its meaning, refers to something which is not a concept or a principle.[22]

Only through language, through the use of concepts, can we communicate that which is by its very nature not a concept. But the fact that our access to the non-conceptual is mediated through language means that language is a part of reality itself. The hard sciences treat language as a mere epiphenomenon, as something blocking our access to the real world. Science attempts to strip away what it sees as human error in an attempt to craft distilled formulas that perfectly describe the world. But clearly, no matter how pure any formula might be, it remains nonidentical to the thing it is describing. The hacking away of that which appears inconsistent, that is, the hacking away of subjectivity, from any approach to understanding the world, presupposes noncontradiction, *presupposes a rational order in the world*, and therefore, *assumes* a truth about the world before any enquiry takes place.[23] But it would be equally mistaken to counter the hard sciences by claiming that everything is *just* a "social construction."[24] Positing language alone as the driving force and constitution of human history is a maneuverer that simply inverts, rather than negates, the reified position of the hard sciences. Philosophy should not waste energy the logic of either-or.[25] The subject is from the outset an

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[21] Martijn P. van den Heuvel, et al., 'Efficiency of Functional Brain Networks and Intellectual Performance', *The Journal of Neuroscience*, 29.23 (2009), pp. 7619-7624.

[22] Theodor W. Adorno, *Metaphysics: Concept and Problems*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 67.

[23] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics,* p. 140.

[24] Deborah Cook, *Adorno On Nature* (Durham: Acumen, 2011), p.11.

[25] Adorno, *Metaphysics,* p. 68.

object, and so exists in the objective world. The somatic element of thinking reminds thinking of its inescapable relationship to the world. Sensation, feeling, and emotion, require a somatic moment; skin, dopamine, and nerve endings. The inexpressibility of bodily suffering and pleasure is testament to the irreducibility of the world to either mind or matter, to either subject or object. What Adorno calls the "preponderance of the objective"[26] is the maintenance of this antagonism, it is the refusal to settle on a starting point in any philosophical enquiry. To demand that thinking must reach out beyond thinking, to demand that one must reach out beyond the prison of language, is an impossible demand. The prisoner reaches beyond the prison walls trying to taste the unsullied air of the world only to find on their tongue that familiar pungency. This impossibility, however, is how thinking can turn against itself and prevent the concepts that it creates to describe the world from appearing as though they are identical to it. Only by reaching out beyond the inescapable prison can thinking keep the prison in sight. Giving logical priority to the object does not pretend to seek to know the "thing in itself", but rather removes the central importance of the *epistemic* subject, the central importance of conceptual thinking.

Science and philosophy

One might ask why I would bother returning to the hard sciences when talking about the dialectic. This dissertation has as a central topic climate change. The effects, extent, and causes of climate change have become known thanks, in most part, to the sciences. Philosophy is not worth its name if it does not take seriously the facts brought to it by the sciences. The determinate negation of the identity thinking and positivism found in the sciences is not an effort to do away with the findings of the sciences. The task of science is research, the task of philosophy is interpretation.[27] What for science is an unbreakable facticity is for philosophy only the first step. Science today actively seeks to remove the subject from its work. The scientific method itself is a safeguard that prevents any contamination from the subject. The validity of any scientific claim rests upon categories that are brought to the enquiry *a priori.* Repeatability, noncontradiction, predictability, and an absence of bias are measures of truth that eliminates subjectivity and assumes characteristics about the world that might not be

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[26] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 183.

[27] Theodor W. Adorno, 'The Actuality of Philosophy', *telos*, 1977.31 (1977), pp. 120-133 (p. 131).

present. Philosophy reunites the subject with the world from which the sciences have removed it, even if that reunion bares no reconciliation. If we return to the questions that I am asking in this dissertation, the hard sciences drive a wedge between them. The fact that technologically advanced capitalist societies knowingly engage in activities that are making the planet inhospitable to human life, is for the hard sciences precisely why the errors, the irrationality, of the human mind have no place in the strict, rational procedures used to determine what defines nature. Despite the indispensability of scientific findings, science alone cannot answer the questions posed in this dissertation. When it tries, the human mind, society, and history are understood to be no different that the mechanistic relations between inanimate objects.[28] Philosophy must do more than this, and this more is what I will be drawing out in this dissertation.

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[28] Elise Amel, et al., 'Beyond the roots of human inaction: Fostering collective effort toward ecosystem conservation', *Science,* 365 (2017), pp. 275-279.

II

"...it [is] up to thought to see all nature, and whatever would install itself as such, as history, and all history as nature"[29]

The concept of 'nature', more than any other concept, is overdetermined to the degree that it becomes almost meaningless. One the one hand, the concept of nature necessarily includes everything possible in the universe, from gluons to anxiety to the universe itself. On the other hand, nature is that which is not human or human made, and even then, humans have their own nature. However, between the concept of nature as literally everything, and the concept of nature as everything minus one entity, there is an underlying thread that connects them: inevitability. In this chapter, I will show how nature is both conceptually and actually constructed through history and human activity. My intention is to show the contingency latent within nature and the way that the inevitability that lingers within the concept of nature finds its origins in culture.

What is nature?

Around 4,000BC, the forests on the British Isle began to disappear. The introduction of Neolithic farming practices created prime conditions for the spread of Elm Disease. The creation of large clearings within forests and the practice of pollarding encouraged the spread of the disease carrying bark-beetle. The condensation of food sources and the reduction in population of predators allowed bark-beetles to move between trees more effectively while increasing their numbers.[30] During the 'Elm Decline', the growing Neolithic population set about clearing the rest of the forest. The deforestation increased until it reached its peak in the Bronze Age. This period saw the removal of tens of millions of acres of woodland. Scholars are uncertain about how so much woodland was removed so quickly given the rudimentary

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[29] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 359.

[30] Oliver Rackham, *The History of the Countryside: The Classic History of Britain's Landscape, Flora and Fauna* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), pp. 240-246.

tools available at the time. Some speculate that sheer perseverance with stone axes would be enough to begin with.[31] Others argue that the species of trees found on the British Isle could easily be dragged down with ropes once a few of the roots had been hacked.[32] Another idea is that once a few clearings were created, the strength and integrity of the land surrounding the remaining trees weakened to such a degree that storms could easily knock down vast swathes of remaining woodland.[33] Coupled with active deforestation, animal agriculture denied the possibility of regeneration as livestock ate and trampled whatever saplings might have sprouted.[34] What most scholars do agree on is the huge impact that human activity had on the disappearance of the British woodland. At around 500BC, over half of all the forests on the British Isles were gone.[35]

But the impact that humans have had on shaping nature has been known for a long time. Marx criticised Feuerbach for overlooking the historical character of nature. Feuerbach relied on sense-certainty and contemplation to verify the naturalness of certain phenomena. But as Marx rightly pointed out, what appeared to be natural to Feuerbach was in fact a product of human history:

> The cherry-tree, like almost all fruit-trees, was, as is well known, only a few centuries ago transplanted by *commerce* into our zone, and therefore only *by* this action of a definite society in a definite age it has become "sensuous certainty" for Feuerbach.[36]

Whenever a conservationist calls for the preservation of nature as they point towards the baron landscapes of the moorlands on the British Isle, they commit the same mistake as Feuerbach.

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[31] Oliver Rackham, *Trees and Woodland in the British Landscape* (London: Phoenix Press, 2001), pp. 33-36.

[32] Francis Pryor, *The Making of the British Landscape: How We Have Transformed the Land, from Prehistory to Today* (London: Penguin, 2011), p. 48.

[33] Pryor, p. 49.

[34] Tony Brown, 'Clearances and Clearings: Deforestation in Mesolithic/Neolithic Britain', *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*, 16.2 (1997), pp. 133–146 (p. 138).

[35] Rackham, *Trees*, p. 35.

[36] Marx, *The German Ideology,* p. 39.

'What appears untamed in nature and remote from history, belongs (…) to a historical phase in which the social web is so densely woven that the living fear death by suffocation.'[37] As Marx pointed out, once we conceive of nature in such a way, in an *immediate* and self-evident way, all philosophical problems can be resolved into an empirical fact.[38] A cherry-tree *appears* to be perfectly natural because it grows from a seed rather from the hands of a carpenter. This appearance quells the history embedded in every natural artefact.

The hard sciences are only very recently starting to account for what Marx was well aware of. Although wrapped-up in rigid and bureaucratic tones, the 'shifting baseline' problem is now haunting environmental science. The term refers to the way that scientific studies looking to assess the population levels and the health of a certain species are doing so in an already compromised environment. Particularly in studies of fish and coral reefs, human activity had already had a huge impact before scientists established what was 'natural' and desirable for ecological stability.[39] The term was originally used to describe the studies of specific species, but now scientists are beginning to recognise that the term 'shifting baseline' needs to be understood on a macrolevel.[40] Marx's declaration that 'the nature that preceded human history, (…) is nature which today no longer exists anywhere',[41] is a sentiment now shared by the hard sciences.[42] Unfortunately, and predictably, the hard sciences continue to treat humans and nature as exclusive entities *causally* effecting one another, as is the case with

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[37] Theodor W. Adorno, Gretel Adorno, and Rolf Tiedemann, *Aesthetic Theory* (London: Continuum, 2002), pp. 65.

[38] Marx, *German Ideology,* p. 39.

[39] Nancy Knowlton and Jeremy B. C. Jackson, 'Shifting baselines, local impacts, and global change on coral reefs', *PLoS biology*, 6.2 (2008), pp. 215-220 (pp. 215-216).

[40] Luca Santini, et al., 'Shifting baseline in macroecology? Unravelling the influence of human impact on mammalian body mass', *Diversity and Distributions,* 23.6 (2017), pp. 640-649 (p. 641); Paul K. Dayton, et al., 'Sliding Baselines, Ghosts, and Reduced Expectations in Kelp Forest Communities', *Ecological Applications*, 8.2 (1998), pp. 309-322 (pp. 317-318).

[41] Marx, *German Ideology,* p. 40.

[42] Peter Kareiva, et al., 'Domesticated Nature: Shaping Landscapes and Ecosystems for Human Welfare', *Science*, New Series, 316.5833 (2007), pp. 1866-1869 (p. 1866).

the history of British woodland given earlier. Rather that thinking of the mediation of one through the other, the hard sciences remain bureaucratic in their prescription of utilitarian calculations, promoting the management of 'trade-offs' between humans and nature.[43]

Natural history

Adorno agrees with Marx in his assessment of the entwinement of nature and history. Strangely, in his inaugural lecture *The Idea of Natural History*, Adorno does not refer to Marx's critique of Feuerbach, despite almost certainly having read it and despite using the same terminology.[44] This is most probably because Adorno primarily used Benjamin's *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* to guide his thinking in this lecture, and Benjamin had not read Marx's critique of Feuerbach at that time.[45] When returning to the topic of natural history in *Negative Dialectics*, he maintained the central importance of Benjamin's work, but did so through an evidently Marxist lens.[46] Adorno argues that not only the physicality of nature is entirely historical, but so too is the cultural discourse through which we experience nature.[47] For example, the term 'trade-off'[48] found in contemporary scientific literature on the relationship between humans and nature sheds light onto how deeply nature is mediated through society. 'Trade-off' is a calculation between the costs and benefits of any transaction. Trade itself, a prerequisite of any 'trade-off', appears to be the most non-violent, consensual, and reasonable approach to thinking the relationship between humans and nature. Most importantly, trade appears to be a neutral solution, or, to push the interpretation further, the term trade appears to be the *natural* solution to any antagonistic relationship. Nature is

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[43] Kareiva, p. 1869.

[44] Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt Institute* (New York: Free Press, 1977), p. 62.

[45] Cook, *Adorno on Nature*, p. 18.

[46] Buck-Morss, *Origin*, p. 62.

[47] Kate Soper, 'Nature/'nature'', in *Futurenatural: Nature, Science, Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 21-34 (p. 30).

[48] Kareiva, p. 1869.

conceived as what Marx called the 'Eden of the innate rights of Man.'[49] Trade requires freedom, equality, and property. For nature to trade with humans, it must be free to do so. If nature were coerced into giving to humans what they desired then the activity would not be trade at all; it would be theft. Nature and humans must be equal in that they can only trade like-for-like, that is, trade things that mutually satisfy the needs of each party.[50] And trade cannot occur if each party is not the rightful owner of the thing that they are willing to trade away. The assumption must be made that these conditions, the conditions of freedom, equality, and property, exist in nature itself. If they did not, the trade demanded of nature would be coerced, would be pushed upon nature, and would therefore not be trade at all. A forced trade is not a trade, and forcing the conditions in which trade is inevitable annuls the possibility of trade. If nature does not intrinsically possess the conditions that allow for trade, then a 'trade-off' between humans and nature is really a calculation to see how much humans can exploit nature before their activity begins to cause them harm. This contradiction is covered over under current ideological uses of the word 'natural'. Firstly, by the idea that nature is by definition the simply given. The simply given as it stands positions humans and nature as separate and exclusive entities with their own needs. Secondly, if trade was not an intrinsic feature of nature, then trade would be, by definition, *un*natural. The idea that nature might satisfy its needs in a way that is incomparable to trade is ignored. The fact that trade finds its genesis in culture is forgotten. Theories of nature are extrapolated from societal laws, such as private property rights, causality, noncontradiction, exchange, competition, etc. These theories are then re-extrapolated from nature, presented as 'discoveries', and used as proof that nature functions in accordance with certain laws. Unsurprisingly, natural laws *produced* in this manner are in many ways identical to the laws found in society, and are thus used as proof of the naturalness of the status quo.[51] As the inevitability of societal laws are reinforced through their so-called

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[49] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of the Political Economy,* 3 Vols. (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1979) Vol. 1*,* p. 280.

[50] Kareiva, p. 1869.

[51] Frederick Engels, 'Engels to Pyotr Lavrov. 12[-17] November', in *Marx & Engels Collected Works,* 50 vols. (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), Vol. 45, pp.106-109 (pp. 107-108).

discovery in nature, capitalist society becomes ever more irresistible as the only possible way to live.[52]

What must not be taken from this analysis is that society precedes nature, as though Adam himself summoned the light. Conceptual thinking grasps at the natural world returning in its hand only fragments, but these fragments point towards the non-conceptual moment of objectivity. The prison of language should not deter us from acknowledging, however mediated, our biological dependence on the natural world. The human body requires, if it is to continue to survive, nutrition from food, hydration from water, and protection from the elements. The human species requires, if it is to continue to exist, the reproduction of the population. To accept these bare facts is not to revert to a pre-critical acceptance of the hard sciences, nor is it an attempt to seek a primary position from which to build an understanding of what a human is. To accept that humans are also objects tied to the physical world is to accept that the things that compose society, and the things that society manipulates to sustain itself, contain a non-social element that has a determining role in the constitution of reality. Philosophy that ignores this falls into idealism, that is, the idea that the world springs forth from the mind. Contemporary idealism, that stems from the constructivist or radically relativist schools of thought, that proudly declares the world to be no more than a social construct, risks denying the reality and determination of the physical world.[53] While abhorrent cultural practices have been justified under the guise that they are natural, to out rightly deny the determining effect that the physical world has on society is both logically indefensible and politically dangerous.[54] Demonstrating the socially constructed character of scientific certainty proved effective in many emancipatory projects, from race struggles to feminism. This same approach is now used to disrupt emancipatory projects before they gain momentum. Climate change is the prime example of this, with oil companies and right-wing politicians instilling radical doubt about the legitimacy of scientific certainty by seeking to uncover the hidden ideological forces that lie behind every so-called fact.[55] Like the tension between subject and

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[52] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics,* p. 358.

[53] Cook, *Adorno on Nature*, p. 118.

[54] Soper, p. 30.

[55] Bruno Latour, 'Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern', *Critical Inquiry*, 30.2 (2004), pp. 225-248 (pp. 226-228).

object, the separation of that which is intrinsic to human life from that which is contingent can only occur through thinking. Philosophy occurs precisely in this deadlock: "there could be no dialectics without the element of solid things (…) It is up to philosophy to think the things which differ from the thought and yet make it a thought."[56] Pain, suffering, pleasure, orgasm; the sparks that shoot along nerve endings into our brains remind us that we are objects and that there is a real and somatic limit to how constructed reality can be. However, at risk of repeating myself, this limit itself escapes the grasp of conceptual thinking and finds its place in thought, and in the words on this page, thoroughly mediated through a distinct historical and cultural moment. As language, culture, and history move and change, so too do the concepts and ideas that are used to mediate the non-conceptual.

The antithesis between society and nature, or history and nature, is simultaneously true and false. It is true in those moments when the possibility of abolishing natural laws flashes up; it is false when society conceals its own historical growth. In the next chapter, I will be interpreting what I think is one of the central antagonisms that separates the two questions formulated at the beginning of this dissertation. The idea that humans naturally act upon their instincts for self-preservation, or to put it in everyday language, the idea that people are naturally selfish, is an idea that quickly shows itself to be distinctly social.

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[56] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 192.

III

Historically, the relationship between humans and nature has been one based on the notion of self-preservation. Humans have either manipulated nature to provide sustenance, or to defended themselves against natures harsh conditions. Both examples of manipulation see humans using nature against itself. Today, however, self-preservation has been made virtually easy. And yet, despite the abundance of resources, the UK has seen consistent increases in homelessness, foodbank usage, and poverty. The problem of scarcity that surrounds these issues is false, and so too is the drive for self-preservation borne from it. In this chapter, I will examine the way that people are forced into a position in which the future turns to darkness and uncertainty, and how in the face of this, the threat of climate change very loudly and inevitably marches in. I will be looking specifically at food, but the analysis given below can be applied to a wide range of things required to sustain human society, such as shelter, education, water, and community.

Scarcity and the plague on earth

David Attenborough has described humans as a 'plague on earth'. His conviction is that famines, such as those in Ethiopia, are caused by overpopulation. The sheer number of people on the planet is quickly becoming too large to ensure an adequate food supply.[57] But Attenborough is not alone. Many scientists, politicians, and environmental activists think that famines are primarily caused by overpopulation. Their argument relies on the infamous 'hockey stick' graph that shows the global human population rocket from around one billion in the early 18th century up to the current figure of over seven billion.[58] Those who peddle the

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[57] James Meikle, 'Sir David Attenborough warns against large families and predicts things will only get worse', *Guardian,* (Tuesday 10 September 2013), <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2013/sep/10/david-attenborough-human-evolution-stopped>, [Accesses 10th July 2017]

[58] William Ryerson, 'Population: The multiplier of everything else', in *The post carbon reader: Managing the 21st century's sustainability crises,* (Healdsburg, California: Watershed Media, 2010), pp. 153-174 (p. 155).

overpopulation rhetoric equate humans with animals.[59] As *any* species gets better at acquiring food, their numbers increase. As their numbers increase, food becomes scarce. This scarcity brings about more competition and the weakest members start to die. Once the population drops below a certain point, the food supply replenishes itself and the cycle begins again. Thomas Malthus was the first to make this argument, but many still cling on to the blind equivocation between all animal species and humans, with some explicitly turning back to Malthus's essay.[60]

This narrative is sinister for many reasons. The most sinister of all is the claim that famine, poverty, and scarcity are completely natural, that is, completely inevitable. By equating humans with animals, neo-Malthusians, firstly, blind themselves to the social origins of their descriptions of nature, and secondly, they dismiss any hint at the idea that life could be different. Malthus's essay, and the thinking that went into it, was markedly arithmetic. More precisely, it was economic; balance was key. Population fluctuations in the natural world were depicted as a kind of economy moving between debt and credit, between spending and saving. No serious anthropological study was undertaken by Malthus who simply imposed a combination of economics and strict protestant values onto his image of the world.[61] Animal populations, human populations, and the universe itself functioned within bourgeois economic logic. This is ignored by the neo-Malthusians who still return to the population charts in their prediction of doom. However, even on arithmetical terms, the *inevitability* of famine and starvation is painfully absurd. Annually, humans produce double the amount of food required to feed every single person on the planet.[62] Starvation is characteristic of not *having* enough to eat, rather than there not *being enough* to eat.[63] Globally, we waste around one third of all the

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[59] V. I. Danilov-Danil'ian and K S. Losev, *Sustainable Development and the Limitation of Growth: Future Prospects for World Civilization*, Springer-Praxis Books in Environmental Sciences (Berlin: Apringer, 2009), p. 34.

[60] John Bellamy Foster, 'Malthus' Essay on Population at Age 200: A Marxian View', *Monthly Review*, 50.7 (1998), pp. 1-18 (p. 16).

[61] Foster, *Malthus*, p. 5.

[62] Emily S Cassidy, et al, 'Redefining agricultural yields: from tonnes to people nourished per hectare', *Environmental Research Letters*, 8 (2013), pp. 1-8.

[63] Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay On Entitlement and Deprivation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 1.

food we produce, while also using millions of tonnes of crops in the meat industry with an efficiency of 12kg of crops to 1kg of meat.[64] In short, the neo-Malthusian argument about the inevitability of famines is demonstrably wrong on its own terms; there is enough food to go around.

Proving that there is enough food to feed everyone on the planet is met with reminders that if food is produced in the same way that it currently is, we will encounter catastrophic crop failures. Current agricultural practices depleted the soil of nutrients, and the fertilisers currently in use poison the water ways.[65] The neo-Malthusians are right to point out that the current agricultural methods will eventually trigger crop failures and poisoned water ways. This is something that Marx called a 'metabolic rift'. The idea describes the way that monocultural, bureaucratic farming techniques strip away huge amounts of nutrients from the land and transport it to urban areas where it is consumed or disposed of.[66] The nutrients never returns to where it was extracted from thus leaving vast areas of land largely depleted. Despite how true the claim might be, and despite its direct relation to this dissertation, it is ultimately a side step. The reason that people are starving to death in a world filled with food is not because of the *future* depletion of soil nutrients. Private property relations currently ensure scarcity. Private property allows individuals to enjoy and dispose of objects however they wish and can do so away from any outside interference that might impact the realisation of their individual freedom.[67] The legal owner of food can dispose of it however they like. To steal food in order to stave of malnourishment is to deny the owner of that food their basic, natural rights. The State ensures that a person stealing food to stave of malnourishment can be imprisoned. Food, like water and shelter, is a commodity like any other, and one must acquire it through trade. In a fully developed market economy, the physical subject, the human body, becomes secondary to the worker. Only as a worker is the physical subject allowed to acquire their basic sustenance.

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[64] Cassidy, p. 3.

[65] Julian Cribb, *Surviving the 21st Century Humanity's Ten Great Challenges and How We Can Overcome Them* (Switzerland: Springer, 2017), p. 130.

[66] John Bellamy Foster, 'Marx's Theory of Metabolic Rift: Classical Foundations for Environmental Sociology', *AJS,* 105.2 (1999), pp. 366–405 (pp. 379-380).

[67] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, 'On the Jewish Question', in *Marx & Engels Collected Works*, 50 Vols. (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), Vol. 3, pp. 146-174 (p. 163).

Those who starve are not entitled to food because they have nothing to offer in a free and fair exchange of commodities. One must trade their bodies for wages and their wages for food.[68] The link between food production and climate change, then, is much more immediate. The synthetic character of scarcity forces the vast majority of people to act upon the notion of self-preservation, preventing them from being able to act to change the current course of events.

The future is opaque

Self-preservation is largely instinctual in character. But without mediation through the social, it cannot exist at all. The instinctual character of self-preservation on its own becomes a tautology; what is ought to be.[69] Although every attempt to express what self-preservation is inevitably falls short, this falling short is testament to the truth of its historical mediation, rather than the falsity of its existence. The ancient dread of physical self-annihilation is the guarantor of history: 'The first premise of all human history is, of course, the existence of living human individuals.'[70] The individual under capitalism necessarily surrenders the task of self-preservation to the state and the economy.[71] But this is far from voluntary. The social world precedes the individual, and thus the individual enters a world of ready-made concrete laws. And in this highly socialised and rationalised world, many decisions and situations are predetermined. From the language spoken, to the way in which one is allowed to acquire sustenance, to the laws that dictate the exchange of one's physical body for wages, individual freedom is restricted to minute details.[72] The mimetic response of children is not blind to the rationalising forces that strip individuals of all power.[73] Neither is it blind to the fear that

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[68] Sen, p. 4.

[69] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics,* p. 349.

[70] Marx, *German Ideology,* p. 31.

[71] Deborah Cook, 'Staying Alive: Adorno and Habermas on Self-Preservation under Late Capitalism', *Rethinking Marxism*, 18.3 (2006), pp. 433-447 (p. 437).

[72] Theodor Adorno, 'Sociology and Psychology (I)', *New Left Review*, 46 (1967), pp. 67-80 (p. 79.)

[73] Theodor Adorno, 'Sociology and Psychology (II)', *New Left Review*, 47 (1967), pp. 79-97 (p. 90).

shimmers throughout everyday life. To become socialised is to become proficient in how to survive. On the horizon sits the 'fate of the *déclassé.*'[74] The image of the consequences that follow the refusal to conform reminds each individual of this horizon, and how just beyond it awaits hunger and homelessness. This image must be hammered in by the media.[75] Failure to adjust to rational economic behaviour is to fall out of society. Sustenance is provided by the State and the economy under strict conditions. The injunction to conform to societal norms, and thus reproduce the status quo, has become tied with instinctual self-preservation because of the physical coercion and bodily torment found in a social system that hordes mountains of food as people starve. To step outside of society would require super-human powers, and even then, the stench of the mansion built of dog-shit would never allow for proper relief.[76] The individual must, if they are to survive, both bodily and socially, as if the two could ever be separated, conform to the same system that threatens their survival.

The threat posed against individual survival is more than the banishment from society to a life of homelessness and hunger. Although the neo-Malthusians are wrong to cite the future degradation of the soil as the reason for current examples of starvation, they are right that this future is very real and really does risk the ability for humans to sustain themselves. But this future is opaque. This future is tossed into the darkness that sits just a few months down the road. A system that has as a structuring principle the constant struggle the individual self-preservation is a system that throws salt into its own eyes: 'it is only through the principle of individual self-preservation, for all its narrowmindedness, that the whole will function.'[77] No amount of 'awareness' changes the fact that even those who are included within the sphere of social acceptance are living hand to mouth. A third of working families are constantly living

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[74] Adorno, *S&P (I),* p. 71.

[75] Adorno, *S&P (I),* p. 71.

[76] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 366.

[77] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics,* p. 312.

only one month away from homelessness.[78] Highly trained nurses are using foodbanks.[79] An *awareness* of the catastrophic affects that current agricultural practices contribute towards climate change does not change the structural limitations on a person's activity. Abstaining from the consumption of palm oil, for example, because millions of acres of rainforest are stripped away and Orangutans are burned alive, is a privilege for those who can afford to purchase "sustainable" alternatives. Ethical consumerism is for those atrocious enough to adapt to an atrocious life.[80] The majority of the population are 'aware' of climate change, but they must engage in practices that perpetuate climate change if they are to secure their bodily existence. The act of knowing doesn't change the situation. Campaigns to raise awareness of climate change do nothing more than ensure that guilt saturates every bite of every meal. Self-preservation in technologically advanced capitalist societies functions to serve the opposite goal: self-annihilation. The impossibility of sustaining oneself outside of society forces the individual to live in a society which brings about its own extinction. There is no stepping out, and this impossibility fuses the natural with the social even further.

The entwinement of society and nature is now so tight that actually unpicking that which is natural from that which is social is impossible. This situation reaches beyond intellectual interpretation and runs to the heart of the contradiction at the centre of capitalist society. The goal of producing enough food to satisfy the pressing task of self-preservation is now geared towards maintaining the growth of the economy. The indifference towards individual suffering is a structural principle. The inescapability of this situation forces members of society to remain aware of the dire consequences of their way of life while remaining utterly powerless to live, or even imaging living, a different life.

The task of philosophy is certainly not to prescribe solutions. If after an analysis the situation appears to be truly inescapable, the guilt or anxiety that this conclusion might produce

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[78] Shelter, 'One in three working families only one paycheque away from losing their home', *Shelter*, (9th, August, 2016), <https://england.shelter.org.uk/media/press_releases/articles/one_paycheque_away>, [Accessed 23rd July 2017].

[79] RCN, 'Time to Strike?', *Activate*, 11.8 (2017), p. 1.

[80] Adorno, *S&P (II)*, p. 84.

is by no means a good enough reason to modify the analysis.[81] Such an act would be pure deceit. However, the situation today is not so gloomy. In the following two chapters I will turn towards Walter Benjamin's essay *The Destructive Character* and the practice of 'Rewilding' in order to argue that emancipatory praxis is far from unthinkable in our historical moment. I will argue that in the face of the situation highlighted above, we must destroy nature.

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[81] Theodor W. Adorno, 'Resignation', in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 289-293 (p. 290).

IV

Susan Sontag reads *Der destruktive Charakter* in a way that ties it directly to Benjamin's personal life. While his well-documented melancholia no doubt influenced his writing, Sontag presents *Der destruktive Charakter* as a cathartic moment for Benjamin, as a way of helping himself overcome suicidal thoughts and impulses.[82] Sontag's reading, as well as parts of the English translations, disguise the critical impact of Benjamin's essay. I will be moving between both English translations and the original text to bring out the powerful connotations that emerge from Benjamin's writing. In this chapter, I intend to appropriate this position to later demonstrate that nature requires its own destruction if it is to survive.

Darstellung

In the two most commonly read English translations of Benjamin's essay *Der destruktive Charakter*, the German word 'Darstellung' is glossed over. In Edmund Jephcott's translation, the word used is 'picturing'.[83] In the Rodney Livingstone translation, the word is 'representing'.[84] Both translations use the present continuous tense. The subject is dealt a shock, and this shock gives them a better chance of *creating* a copy or an imitation of the original destructive character. Darstellung, however, is not used in this way by Benjamin. In the essay, Darstellung is a proper noun. Nowhere does Benjamin imply that Darstellung is created *by* the subject who is dealt the shock. The original reads, '…desto größer sind damit

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[82] Susan Sontag, 'Introduction', in *One Way Street: And Other Essays,* trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: Penguin, 2009), pp. 7-28 (pp. 26-27).

[83] Walter Benjamin, 'The Destructive Character', in *One Way Street: And Other Essays,* trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: Penguin, 2009), pp. 157-159 (p. 157). [Hereafter referenced as 'Jephcott'].

[84] Walter Benjamin, 'The Destructive Character', in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, ed. by Marcus Bullock & Michael W. Jennings, 4 Vols. (London: The Belknap Press, 2004), Vol. II pt. 2 1927-1934, pp. 541-524 (p. 541). [Hereafter referenced as 'Livingstone'].

seine Chancen für eine Darstellung des destruktiven Charakters.'[85] There is no verb, and certainly no use of a verb in the present continuous tense. The connotations that stem from these translations imply that the destructive character is tied to the petty bourgeois notion of character, that is, the idea that character is a synonym for personality. This notion of character is, as we shall see later, exactly the kind of thinking that the destructive character seeks to destroy.[86] A *direct* translation reads '…the greater the chance for a representation of the destructive character.' Both 'picturing' and 'representing' are misleading in that they position the subject as the agent in the production of this representation, something that Benjamin did not intend. This change in meaning is important once we consider the next problem; the untranslatability of Darstellung.

The term Darstellung played an important and defining role in the German Enlightenment. Beginning with Kant, through the Romantic period, and eventually finding its way into contemporary discussion, Darstellung has been a concept fraught with contestation. Traditionally, the word Darstellung has been translated into English as 'representation'.[87] Although in *some* cases this translation might be accurate, in the genealogy of German philosophical thought, especially in the work of Benjamin, this translation is extremely misleading. The word 'representation' implies that a copy has been produced of an original. Benjamin problematises this idea in his essay on translation. What is key in Benjamin's thinking on translation is his insistence on asymmetry. A literary work, for example, cannot be a translation of itself. The translation is distinct from the original and yet is grounded by it.[88] The original, however, can exist without ever being translated. 'Representation' is closer to the

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[85] Walter Benjamin, 'Der destruktive Charakter', in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 7 Vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1977), Vol. IV:I, pp. 396-398 (p. 396).

[86] Irving Wohlfarth, 'No-man's-land: On Walter Benjamin's 'Destructive Character'', in *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy: Destruction and Experience*, ed. by Andrew Benjamin and Peter Osborne (London; Routledge, 2001) pp. 155-182 (p. 158).

[87] Martha B. Helfer, *The Retreat of Representation: The Concept of Darstellung in German Critical Discourse* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 9.

[88] Alexei Procyshyn, 'Walter Benjamin's Philosophy of Language', *Philosophy Compass*, 9.6 (2014) pp. 368-381 (p. 377).

word 'translation' than it is Darstellung because the original that is being represented, whether visually, linguistically, or philosophically, remains unmodified.[89]

For Benjamin, who explicitly returned to the Kantian notion of Darstellung, the concept is much more complicated. In his return to Kant, Benjamin chastised Kant for trying to eliminate the difficulties immanent to the concept of Darstellung by using mathematics. This problematic element can be abbreviated as the tension between the phenomenal and noumenal worlds. What Kant achieved, Benjamin argued, was a move towards pure cognition at the expense of the truth content of language.[90] Benjamin returned to the Kantian notion of Darstellung intent on demonstrating the mediated character of the concept by retaining the power of language as a *generative* force. Darstellung for Benjamin was more than merely 'representation' because the subject matter comes into being only *through* its representation. It is not as though that which finds its representation, its expression, in Darstellung does not exist at all prior to finding its expression.[91] Prior to Darstellung, a thing remains expression*less*, unmediated, non-conceptual, *unthinkable*. Once mediated through Darstellung, a thing is granted life, granted being, and its history is retroactively posited. This differs from the Kantian notion of Darstellung, which lays ever-rational concepts upon the noumenal world, and runs parallel to the dialectic found in Hegel.[92] Darstellung deliberately plays with the reified binaries between representation and presentation, original and copy, resemblance and construction. 'Representation' falls short of an adequate translation because of the very implicit notion of *prima philosophia* and origins. Benjamin uses Darstellung to do away with the priority of the first, but he does so by retaining the contradictory character of his thinking *within* the concept itself. Darstellung deliberately forces the reader to move between the so-called representation and the original in order to establish that they cannot be thought separately, and that the very concepts 'original' and 'representation' are abstract concepts that impede a thorough

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[89] David S. Ferris, 'Introduction: Reading Benjamin', in *The Cambridge companion to Walter Benjamin*, ed. By David S. Ferris, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 1-17 (p. 11).

[90] Helfer, p. 178.

[91] Jan Urbich, *Benjamin and Hegel. A Constellation in Metaphysics* (Spain; Documenta Universitaria, 2016), Kindle Edition, location 1097.

[92] Urbich, location 1125.

interpretation. And so, the destructive character is not an already existing, ready formed entity in which an individual produces a representation of. Both the individual and the destructive character find their realisation through the mediation of each other.

Both English translations of *Der destruktive Charakter* risk obfuscating the critical precision of Benjamin's work in another way. Later in the essay, Benjamin writes: 'Dem destruktiven Charakter schwebt kein Bild vor.'[93] The German word 'Bild' is translated as either 'vision'[94] or 'image'[95]. These translations are accurate, in that Bild roughly translates to mean an optical representation of something. Bild stands separate from the destructive character, whereas Darstellung, the representation-as-being, remains inexorably entwined with the destructive character. The separation of the destructive character from Bild becomes clearer when we consider the use of the dative case in the original text. The destructive character is an *indirect object of* Bild. A direct translation reads, 'No image hangs before the destructive character.' There is no interaction between the destructive character and the image except as spatiotemporal references; no image hangs *before* the destructive character. The image, as *separate from* the destructive character, is not created by the destructive character. This implies historical, or objective fate, rather than a personal goal. Both English translations present the image as directly subjective, as a mental image of sorts, and therefore misses this difference. Images, visions, pictures, and representations, are concepts that gloss over the critical distinction between Bild and Darstellung. If we return to the line examined earlier, we have a much clearer idea of the dialectical notion of the destructive character. The line, '…desto größer sind damit seine Chancen für eine Darstellung des destruktiven Charakters', no longer reads as the subject producing the image of the destructive character, but as the emergence of the destructive character, its realisation, via its immanent mediation *through* the subject.

Destruction

The destructive character is not to be conflated with personality; it is not one mindset amongst many. Petty bourgeois notions of character, that praise a *possessive* individualism,

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[93] Benjamin, *Der destruktive Charakter,* p. 397.

[94] Jephcott, p. 157.

[95] Livingstone, p. 541.

that pressure the subject to *have* a variety of quirks, presents itself as enlightened and progressive. The refinement of character, however, is the adjustment to social pressure, the ability to jump between pre-established traits in order to conform more easily, and thus is the opposite of freedom and emancipation.[96] This is why Sontag's interpretation, that depicts the destructive character as a source of optimism against the subjective turmoil of suicidal thought, misses the mark.[97] The notion of character in this sense is to be destroyed by the destructive character.[98] Benjamin makes this clear when he says that destruction clears away 'traces of our own age' and eradicates the *condition* of the destructive character.[99]

The destructive character does not reduce a thing to rubble for the sake of the rubble.[100] Its effort is not geared towards a nihilistic backlash against the senseless productivity of capitalism. As we saw in the previous chapters, the capitalist mode of production is destructive in the typical, negative sense of the word. What the destructive character seeks to reduce to rubble are the structures that capitalism built for the sake of building. Production for the sake of production, exponential growth beyond the needs that it set out to satisfy, render the capitalist mode of production to be, in crude terms, a mode of destruction. In the face of this, destruction for destructions sake would merely be a catalyst for the forces already thundering along. In Benjamin's words, destruction 'obliterates even the traces of destruction.'[101] The reified notion of destruction as inherently bad, and production as inherently good, would be obliterated.[102] Destruction for Benjamin is neither the reified opposite of production nor blind destruction; neither is it an abstract synthesis between the two. Destruction is the dismantlement of that which solidifies itself as immutable, as natural. The rubble that an object is reduced to is not swept away and tossed onto the trash heap of history. The rubble, at first, demarcates a space that allows the destructive character to breathe. The destructive character

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[96] Adorno, *S&P (II)*, p. 85.

[97] Sontag, p. 27.

[98] Wohlfarth, p. 159.

[99] Jephcott, p. 157; Livingstone, p. 541.

[100] Jephcott, p. 159; Livingstone, p. 542.

[101] Jephcott, p. 158; Livingstone, p. 542.

[102] Wohlfarth, p. 160.

knows the limits of what *knowledge* can bring and so it does not seek to know what will replace that which it has destroyed. It does not seek to be understood because the current conditions that assess the quality, relevance, and truth of knowledge will be destroyed. Knowledge under current conditions is granted legitimacy and authority according to how new it is, how fresh it is as a contribution to any subject area. Newness for the sake of newness matches the blind productivity of the capitalist mode of production. The destructive character dismantles that which stands as a blockage limiting the potential for emancipation, neither blindly nor guided by strict *a priori* plans with end goals in mind. Destruction rubs up close to determinate negation in the way that it demarcates a space using the materials, the rubble, immanent to the object itself.[103] The rubble is made up of tradition, culture, technology, science, art, language. The task that the destructive character sets itself is not to be a comfort for those who desperately cling onto what life they have left under current conditions. It only knows one activity: clearing away (räumen).[104]

The destructive character is, contrary to Sontag's reading, and contrary to the individualism implicit in the English translations, a *revolutionary* subject. The line 'suicide is not worth the trouble' is not an attempt by Benjamin to look beyond suicidal thoughts. Suicide is not worth the trouble because it remains an individual act.[105] This reading is not to denounce or trivialise the very serious problem of suicide, or to say that the individual might never find themselves in a position in which suicide is the only possible form of resistance.[106] Suicide as an individual act means that escape, or relief, is sought on an individual level. The world remains external to the individual who finds themselves subjected to life's horror. The destructive character remains impervious to this individual despair because in its singular mindset, it seeks to dismantle the structures that would condemn the individual to an alienated, isolated, and painful existence. The destructive character seeks to not only destroy its own condition, but also the obliteration of the conditions of our age. Suicide is not synonymous with this gesture. Suicide annihilates the agonised individual and is an act that ultimately leaves intact the society through which they were forced to suffer. The destructive character is

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[103] Wohlfarth, p. 162.

[104] Jephcott, p. 157; Livingstone, p. 541.

[105] Wohlfarth, p. 164.

[106] Buck-Morss, *The Origin*, pp. 162-163.

revolutionary, and the chance for revolution does not hide behind *every* corner. Only through the shock felt by the individual looking back over their life could the *Darstellung* of the destructive character have chance to emerge. Once could not contemplate their life at a distance, holding the trauma at arm's length. The shock felt must be somatic, bodily, non-conceptual. No mental image, no distanced contemplation, suffices the desires of the destructive character. Only a total commitment to a life that reduces the world to rubble succeeds in bringing about the destructive character.

V

Previous chapters in this dissertation have shown how nature, both internal and external, is demonstrably historical in character. The two specific areas examined have been the idea that humans are inescapably driven by the instinct for self-preservation and the idea that anything that is not concrete and steel is pure, unsullied nature. Through the Benjaminian notion of destruction I intend to show how emancipation proper requires the destruction of both internal and external nature. Adorno was right to insist that philosophy is not prescriptive, that philosophical enquiry does not carry the burden of answering the question, "what is to be done?" However, today there are practices emerging that, when examined through the philosophical enquiry employed in this dissertation, show themselves to be enticingly promising for a mode of praxis.

Rewilding

Conservation in ecology is the conservation of certain processes. Plant and animal life grow, migrate, move, and mutually effect other organisms. An organism that does not move is dead. And so, conservation cannot seek to maintain any area of nature in the same way that one preserves an ancient relic in a museum, painstakingly ensuring the least amount of change, or decay. Conservation projects choose *which* processes are to be encouraged, and which are to be suppressed. As this dissertation has shown, many of the processes that appear natural, or non-human, find their roots in human activity. The approach to conservation taken by the National Park Association in the UK is one example of an organisation that seeks to conserve a distinctly manufactured image of nature. On the one hand, they try to maintain the culture and economy of sheep farming, grouse hunting, and rambling, while on the other hand they remain aware that nature cannot support such activities.[107] The British moorlands, as made clear in chapter II, have been stripped bare of the forest that would grow if left alone. The expansive Yorkshire Dales, for example, would be a rainforest were it not for the interference

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[107] Laura Cole, *George Monbiot on the future of rewilding* (27th November 2015), <http://geographical.co.uk/nature/wildlife/item/1419-george-monbiot-on-the-future-of-rewilding> [accessed 8th August 2017].

of the National Park Association.[108] The stripping and burning of the moors is presented as means of conserving nature, yet such activities clearly strip nature of its spontaneous self-movement. Surrounding the moorlands are expansive fields of monocultural crops that contribute towards the metabolic rift that Marx warned of. Humans tore away the forests and now ensure that the wound never heals. But the open wound bleeds. The floods in Leeds, for example, were caused by the lack of upland trees absorbing and diverting the huge amount of rain from rolling off the Yorkshire Dales.[109] The image of nature that the National Parks Association actively conserves is one that ensures catastrophe after catastrophe. Billions of pounds are spent each year by the UK government and the National Parks Association to ensure that this image endures.[110] The floods, it should be noted, are not just catastrophic for people. Such an insistence continues to posit nature as a single entity external to humans. The loss of soil fertility, habitat, and food is also catastrophic for the countless living things subjected to the floods. Nature as it stands is both a thing to be exploited by humans and a thing to be protected against this exploitation. The tension between these two relationships is the focus for current conservation projects. And so, conservation currently achieves the opposite of what it sets out to do by making impossible the continuation of both human and non-human life.

Rewilding is a recent approach to ecological science that recognises the problems of traditional conservation projects. Rewilding is not a hands-off approach that relegates humans as passive observers, and it is also not the strict management of what nature is forced to be. Rewilding re-establishes the foundations of the habitats lost to prior management and agriculture.[111] Once the foundations are laid, nature is left to develop on its own terms. Rewilding does not *reverse* the damage, but removes the human made structures, such as

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[108] Emma Fordham, *Who's messing with Hebden Bridge's vital flood barrier?* (20th August 2012), <https://newint.org/blog/2012/08/20/hebden-bridge-moor> [accessed 8th August 2017].

[109] M. R. Marshall, et al., 'The impact of rural land management changes on soil hydraulic properties and runoff processes: results from experimental plots in upland UK', *Hydrolical Process*, 28 (2013), pp. 2617-2629 (p. 2628).

[110] George Monbiot, *Feral: Rewilding the Land, the Sea and Human Life* (The University of Chicago Press; London, 2014), p. 154.

[111] Silvia Ceaușu, et al., 'Mapping opportunities and challenges for rewilding in Europe', *Conservation Biology,* 29.4 (2015), pp. 1017-1027 (p. 1018).

government legislation, strictly defined enclosures, and monocultural farming practices. Once removed, nature is then able to move and develop freely. The freedom has two distinct characteristics. Firstly, it is granted *by* humans. Scientific knowledge and modern technology are vital to rewilding. Knowing which species of plants and animals are native to the area, how spread out they need to be in their reintroduction, how their reintroduction will affect existing ecosystems, and which invasive species pose the biggest threats to the longevity of the environment, are just a few examples of the considerations needed to be made before rewilding projects can go ahead. This knowledge is borne from the most contemporary of scientific studies. Secondly, the foundations laid down have no blueprint, no ideal endpoint to move towards.[112] Once established, no image of nature would be held up against how the environment develops. Rewilding, then, is destructive.

Yellowstone

To traditional conservation projects, rewilding is destructive in the usual, negative sense. British Moorlands, the iconic purple blankets of heather, would be destroyed. The pristine, smooth, rolling horizons stretching out into the twinkling, distant skyscrapers of the nearest city would be swallowed up and buried under a forest. But, the destructive character that embeds itself within the ethos of rewilding ignores the plight of tradition as it lays waste to the longing to preserve that which appears to be natural. A concrete example of rewilding is the 'trophic cascading' found in Yellowstone National Park in the United States.[113] The aim of the project was relatively humble, and the leaders of the project certainly did not have the Benjaminian notion of destruction in mind. The small gesture of reintroducing wolves had no other goal except to reintroduce a species that had been lost due to human activity. The result was the complete transformation of the environment. The wolves kept elk populations down, which meant that vegetation could begin to grow in the valley basin. Once vegetation began to grow, the soil gained enough integrity that rivers could begin to form. The newly formed rivers encouraged fish numbers to grow, a range of insect species to proliferate, and birds to migrate

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[112] Monbiot, *Feral*, p. 83.

[113] William J. Ripple and Robert L. Beschta, 'Trophic cascades in Yellowstone: The first 15 years after wolf reintroduction', *Biological Conservation*, 145 (2012) pp. 205–213.

to the area. Trees were growing in greater numbers and to greater heights.[114] In short, the reintroduction of wolves destroyed the old image of nature. The destruction lead to the creation of an entirely different and flourishing ecosystem, one that nobody predicted, or could have predicted. What stopped the wolves from living in Yellowstone National Park was, firstly, their extinction due to hunting, but secondly, resistance from conservationists and farmers preventing their reintroduction. The destruction brought about by rewilding was aimed at both human structures and the ecosystem. In Benjaminian terms, the structures that were held in place by tradition, by economic interests, by cultural practices, and by legislation, the structures that ensured the slow degradation of the environment, were shaken to the ground. The rubble was made up of the above list, as well as scientific knowledge, historical awareness of the causes of extinctions, and the needs of the local communities. The wolves became extinct due to hunting, but the hunting was intended to protect livestock. Once extinct, elk number increased so high that they destroyed the pastures through relentless grazing and browsing. Hunting the elk into extinction was both impossible and potentially disastrous for the environment. Fences were erected to control elk migrations, but they too failed. Management and conservation of Yellowstone National Park without the wolves ensured the degradation of the environment.[115] Only through a different kind of human activity, rather than the total absence of it, was nature granted its spontaneity. Destruction was not nihilistic, but was the clearing of a space demarcated by the rubble of the old image. Once destroyed, the destructive character does not ask what will be built in a structure's place. The reintroduction of what was originally deemed to be a threat created an environment in which both humans and nature could flourish. Nature was rescued, and to a degree emancipated, only through the destruction of what tradition deemed to be natural, and the tradition itself.

Who cares?

Despite the destructive potential latent within its ethos, rewilding is currently another ecological project among many. The news of Yellowstone National Park is meaningless to anyone who must live hand-to-mouth. After the 2008 economic crash, polls registered a

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[114] Ripple and Beschta, pp. 206-209.

[115] Monbiot, *Feral*, pp. 85-86.

dramatic decrease in the number of people believing that climate change was a threat.[116] The drop was not coincidental, but rather it was because people were suddenly much more concerned with keeping a roof over their head, ensuring a food supply, and ensuring security for themselves and their family.[117] The poll registered a lack of belief, but people were in fact much more occupied with immediate and pressing issues. At first glance, the polls can be read as evidence that humans always revert to a state of self-interest when resources become scarce. Human nature emerges as the selfish force that it is once social structures break down. But as the previous chapters have shown, this reading is wrong on two fronts. Firstly, resources are not scarce. Continuing with the topic of food addressed in earlier chapters, even if food production dropped by fifty percent there would still be enough to feed every person on the planet. And secondly, current conditions only allow for an individual to survive by acting for their own direct benefit by selling their body as a commodity. Bringing the threads of this essay together, I will now try to formulate the foundations of a way of thinking about human nature that shares the ethos of rewilding, specifically, the destructive character embedded within rewilding.

Returning to the materialist thesis elaborated on in this dissertation, the concept of history can be summarised as the notion that consciousness arises from activity and not the other way around.[118] George Monbiot, a rewilding activist, demonstrates on many occasions the impotence of the rewilding movement when it is conceived as a standalone project detached from dialectical materialism. In an article for the *Guardian,* Monbiot advocated the idea that referring to nature with different words would make people think differently about nature, and

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[116] Robert J. Brulle, Jason Carmichael and J. Craig Jenkins, 'Shifting public opinion on climate change: an empirical assessment of factors influencing concern over climate change in the U.S., 2002–2010', *Climate Change*, 114.2 (2012), pp. 169–188 (p. 184).

[117] Matthew E. Kahn and Matthew J. Kotchen, 'Business Cycle Effects on Concern About Climate Change: The Chilling Effect of Recession', *Climate Change* Economics, 2.3 (2011), pp. 257–273 (p. 267).

[118] Marx, *German Ideology,* p. 36.

therefore act differently towards nature.[119] Human activity is in a dialectical tension with ideology. Our thinking is not laid upon the world, it alters it and emanates from it. Currently, consciousness is tied up with the structural necessity to *sell* one's body in exchange for labour. This necessity comes, in part, from the private ownership of the things required to sustain bare life. Before one can live, one must be valuable *as a commodity*. Humans within this structure appear self-interested, but the appearance is also partly true. The truth comes from the activity itself, rather than the subjective mind. "They do this without being aware of it."[120] It is the *doing* that creates the appearance, not the "being aware of it." The exchange-value that determines a person's worth does not disappear once we realise in our *minds* that it is not a property of the person. The key to this analysis is the demonstration that abstractions *are not* of the mind. And so, even if a person *knows*, or *thinks*, that they are unselfish, altruistic, and considerate of their fellow human being, the structures currently in places force them to sell their body as a commodity and act in a way that is complicit in the very system that they might be against. Why is it that technologically advanced capitalist societies continue to engage in activities that they *know* are making the planet inhospitable for human life? Because as it stands, it is the natural thing to.

The Darstellung of the destructive character would emerge through a guaranteed supply of food. The traditionalists, the conservatives, who insist that beyond the walls of contemporary society lie chaos are half right. Chaos would reign in the eyes of a system that people we no longer forced to participate. Destruction would come like the wolves. The destructive character does not need to know what will be built after the structures have been reduced to rubble, but we can know that this rubble would be made up of both primary and secondary human needs, scientific knowledge, technological development, education, culture, and tradition. Destruction is not burning the world to the ground like the fires of Dresden or the flames of Mosul. Destruction is not the nihilistic and petty razing of all present and future possibilities. The destructive character can see through the solid face of tradition into the forces that hold it up. Destruction would not burn the structures that hoard the food supplies, shaking pitch forks to the beat of its rage. Like an ancient temple still standing strong, current monolithic structures

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[119] George Monbiot, 'Forget 'the environment': we need new words to convey life's wonders', *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/aug/09/forget-the-environment-new-words-lifes-wonders-language>, [date accessed 9th August 2017].

[120] Marx, *Capital*, p. 166-167.

of concrete and steel, that house the bureaucrats and financiers who prolong the status quo, are rubble once their supporting ideologies comes crashing down. The destructive character would not seek to know what people would become, what would happen to human nature, should basic sustenance vanish as an immediate worry. And this destruction, like that of the wolves, begins with speculation.

Adorno's notion of exact fantasy sheds light onto the kind of speculation required to endorse this kind of destruction. Exact fantasy is the speculation that leaps from the given concept into the object without becoming swallowed up by it. In Adorno's own words, exact fantasy is a:

> …fantasy which abides strictly within the material which the sciences present to it, and reaches beyond them only in the smallest aspects of their arrangement: aspects, granted, which fantasy itself must originally generate.[121]

Exact fantasy allows us to speculate beyond the confines of the given. There is already enough food and the technological means to supply it to the people who need it: the means already exist. Although humans currently act to satisfy their immediate self-interest, I have shown that they do so because the structure of society allows for nothing else. Exact fantasy and the destructive character push us beyond the immediately given and point towards an alternate vision of human nature. And this nature, of course, cannot be known directly, but can be inferred negatively. Herbert Marcuse wrote on this issue in his essay *The Concept of Essence*. Marcuse argued that we do not need to know fully what capacities humans might have if we are to make a claim about human suffering and misery. From the experience of oppression, we can infer *negatively* the existence of human capacities that have been suppressed, even if we cannot provide explicit examples.[122] Destruction is a wager, but with climate change looming on darkened horizon, it is a wager that we cannot afford to make. The guarantee of food does not promise the end of climate change, and it does not promise the sudden and miraculous shift in mind set that brings about world peace. The guarantee of food destroys the towering walls that blind people to the impending annihilation of the human species. The destructive character

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[121] Adorno, *Actuality of Philosophy*, p. 131.

[122] Alison Stone, 'Adorno and the disenchantment of nature', *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 32.2 (2006), pp. 231–253 (p. 246).

promises no more than a space to breath, a chance to think, and the rubble to rebuild something else.

Only by thinking nature and society, nature and history, together can the Darstellung of the destructive character be realised. The comparison between the introduction of wolves into an ecosystem with the introduction of a guaranteed food supply to a society might appear as a flagrant conflation of two separate problems. But as this dissertation has shown, the structures that determined the condition and degradation of an ecosystem find their genesis in society. The introduction of wolves was not a slight change to an ecosystem untouched by humans. It was a modification in human activity in a system already controlled and impacted by human activity. The non-conceptuality of the ecosystem, the latent non-human element, sprung forth through an alternative structure. The mediation of this element through the introduction of wolves opened a space, rather than returning to an old, nostalgic ideal. And so too, the speculations made in the dissertation about the destruction that would come about through the guarantee of food is a destructive act aimed at human activity and social structures. The latent, non-conceptual moment of human nature, the somatic and physical moment that remains inescapably tied to thinking, would unfold, would be mediated, through an alternative and currently unthinkable structure. The Darstellung of the destructive character is the self-sacrifice of the current, bourgeois individual, the full commitment to radical change not knowing what will become of both the world and the individual.

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