Reification and the Duty to Work Through the Past: On Critical Theory and Temporality

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In the tradition of Critical Theory, the notions of time and temporality do not play a role as substantive as, for example, in the writings of authors like Heidegger or Bergson.[1] This could partly be explained by the fact that authors belonging to this tradition are critical of phenomenological or intuitive approaches that, in their view, overlook how experience is determined by social conditions and historically formed structures.[2] The attempt to describe "authentic" or "direct" experiences of time or temporality, this suggests, ignores the critical observation that these experiences are permeated with social, cultural, and economic categories and may have an ideological nature, they argue. This does not mean, however, that time and temporality are not mentioned by these authors at all, merely that they always link them to critical analyses of (late) capitalism and of the ideologies that structure the subject in modern societies.

This tension between approaches can be illustrated by an aphorism in Adorno's *Minima Moralia*, titled "Spoilsport." In this passage Adorno describes the experience of boredom in relation to the concept of "free time"

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1. See, e.g., Bergson, *Time and Free Will*; and Heidegger, *Concept of Time*.

2. See, e.g., Horkheimer's analysis of Bergson in "On Bergson's Metaphysics of Time." For a critique of Heidegger's existential phenomenology, see Adorno, *Jargon of Authenticity*. See also Hammer, *Philosophy and Temporality*, 213.

by referring to Arthur Schopenhauer's claim that we feel bored when our desires and needs are satisfied. Whereas Schopenhauer ignores the critical or social dimensions of our perception of time and focuses on what he understands as ahistorical and universal experiences of human beings in general, Adorno historicizes Schopenhauer's observation by claiming that even a respite from labor—"free time"—is permeated with capitalist categories:

> [Schopenhauer's] concept of boredom, raised to such unsuspected dignity, is—and this is the last thing that Schopenhauer's anti-historical mind would admit—bourgeois through and through. It is the complement of alienated labour, being the experience of antithetically "free time," whether because this latter is intended only to restore the energy expended, or because the appropriation of alien labour weighs on it like a mortgage. Free time remains the reflex-action to a production rhythm imposed heteronomously on the subject, compulsively maintained even in the weary pauses. Consciousness of the unfreedom of existence in its entirety, suppressed by the demands of earning a living, that is, by unfreedom itself, only emerges in the intermezzo of freedom. The *nostalgie du dimanche* is not a longing for the working week, but for the state of being emancipated from it; Sunday fails to satisfy, not because it is a day off work, but because its own promise is felt directly as unfulfilled.[3]

Here Adorno probably refers to the following observation by Schopenhauer, in the first volume of *The World as Will and Representation*: "Just as need and want are the constant scourge of the people, so is boredom that of the world of fashion. In middle-class life boredom is represented by the Sunday, just as want is represented by the six weekdays."[4]

Whereas Schopenhauer, in other words, understands the idea that a week is divided into six days to work and one day to be "free" as following from our ahistorical human essence as wanting and willing creatures, Adorno claims that this structure merely came into being in a specific historical epoch and plays an important role in how modern capitalism permeates our lives and makes us into cogs in a social machine.

Following this analysis of the historicity of time, I want to focus in this article on the role that a specific understanding of temporality can and should play in the tradition of Critical Theory. My discussion is divided into three parts. First, I briefly explore several early critical observations on time and tem-

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3. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 175. In his essay on free time, Adorno refers to Schopenhauer's ideas about boredom as well ("Free Time," 191–92).

4. Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Representation*, 313.

porality by Marx, Lukács, and Weber and show that these notions already play an important role in their theories. This overview will end with a focus on the ideas of Hartmut Rosa, who developed a critical analysis of what he calls "social acceleration" and has attempted to embed this theory in the tradition of Critical Theory. Especially the idea that how we experience time has become "second nature," which Rosa takes from Marx, Lukács, and Weber, will play an important role in this overview. Second, I show that Rosa's emphasis on the ideological nature of time and temporality forces him to introduce a normative yardstick with which to criticize what he calls an "ideology of temporality."[5] He mainly refers to the notion of autonomy as the normatively binding ground on which his critique is based, but I argue that he is not entirely clear about the specific understanding of autonomy that he defends. I show that his texts contain two hints regarding what autonomy might entail: the first revolves around the concept of a "narrative identity," the second around Axel Honneth's theory of social recognition. Third, I argue that a combination of these two understandings of autonomy results in a specific understanding of the Marxist concept of reification. In this last part, Honneth's analysis of reification plays an important role. But by way of an interpretation of observations made by Horkheimer and Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and by Adorno on the notion of "working through the past," I argue that Honneth overlooks the temporal conditions that these two authors connect to this concept, which reintroduces the notion of temporality and emphasizes the importance of remembrance.

Part 1: Critical Theory and Temporality

Marx, Lukács, Weber

Throughout his works Marx refers to the observation that the clock has come to dominate how we think about and experience work under capitalism. In the first volume of *Capital*, for example, he provides a detailed overview of labor time, focusing extensively on the amount of work that young children had to do in the England of his time.[6] In the section "The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret" (*C*, 163–77) in the first volume of *Capital*, furthermore, Marx develops a genealogy of the dominant role played by the notion of labor time

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5. In 2015 Rosa published an analysis and defense of the notion of "resonance," which might be understood as such a critical yardstick as well. In this article, however, I am mainly concerned with Rosa's analyses of temporality and acceleration, as well as with the references to "autonomy," "recognition," and the notion of a "narrative identity" as found in these analyses.

6. Marx, *Capital*, 394–95 (hereafter cited as *C*).

and famously argues that the exchange value of products was originally based on the average *time* needed to produce a product (*C*, 164–65). In *The Poverty of Philosophy* he describes the standardizing results of this process as follows:

> Through the subordination of man to the machine the situation arises in which men are effaced by their labour; in which the pendulum of the clock has become as accurate a measure of the relative activity of two workers as it is of the speed of two locomotives. Therefore, we should not say that one man's hour is worth another man's hour, but rather that one man during an hour is worth just as much as another man during an hour. Time is everything, man is nothing; he is at the most the incarnation of time. Quality no longer matters. Quantity alone decides everything: hour for hour, day for day.[7]

A crucial aspect of Marx's analysis consists of the idea that the results of these processes—including the schematizing and objectifying influences of labor time abstractly measured by the clock—eventually appear as a "natural law" (*C*, 168).

This idea was developed further by Georg Lukács, who famously argued in *History and Class Consciousness* that the relations that come about under capitalism permeate the subject's consciousness and result in a veil that covers the world and makes these relations appear to be natural, or "second nature" (*HCC*, 128). Lukács applies this analysis to temporality as well:

> Time sheds its qualitative, variable, flowing nature; it freezes into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable "things" (the reified, mechanically objectified "performance" of the worker, wholly separated from his total human personality): in short, it becomes space. In this environment where time is transformed into abstract, exactly measurable, physical space, an environment at once the cause and effect of the scientifically and mechanically fragmented and specialized production of the object of labour, the subjects of labour must likewise be rationally fragmented. (*HCC*, 90)

Like Marx, Lukács emphasizes the abstract nature of time as measured by the clock, and criticizes how a focus on this kind of time objectifies and schematizes labor and, eventually, workers themselves.

A similar emphasis on the link between temporality and capitalism can be found in Max Weber's analysis of the "spirit of capitalism," a spirit that Weber characterizes with reference to Benjamin Franklin's claim that "time is

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7. As quoted in Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 89–90 (hereafter cited as *HCC*).

money."[8] Weber famously arrives at the conclusion that this "spirit of capitalism" finds its origins in the ascetic ideals that, according to his interpretation, go hand in hand with different branches of Protestantism and their emphasis on predestination. He emphasizes the role that temporality plays in the ethos that characterizes this religious worldview—"every hour lost is lost to labour for the glory of God" (*PESC*, 104)—and comes close to Marx's and Lukács's observations when he claims that the idea that time is money and that one has to work as hard as possible without enjoying the fruits of one's labor is experienced by those living *within* the system as necessary and natural: "The capitalistic economy of the present day is an immense cosmos into which the individual is born, and which presents itself to him, at least as an individual, as an unalterable order of things in which he must live" (*PESC*, 19).

Marcuse and Fromm

Several critical observations of Marx, Lukács, and Weber surface in the works of authors belonging to the first generation of the Frankfurt School, as briefly illustrated above in a passage from Adorno's *Minima Moralia*. As mentioned above as well, most of these authors do not exclusively focus on the notions of time and temporality. However, their writings do contain descriptions of time. In this section I want to briefly focus on two authors—Herbert Marcuse and Erich Fromm—even though I realize that observations on temporality, history, and remembrance can be found in the writings of many other authors who inspired or formed part of this tradition.[9]

In *One-Dimensional Man*, for example, Marcuse refers several times to the ways that life under capitalism is structured according to the concepts of leisure time and work time and argues that the former "thrives in advanced industrial society" and is "unfree to the extent to which it is administered by business and politics."[10] Like Adorno, in other words, Marcuse observes that free time is not "free" but is mediated by a society that is unfree as a whole and

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8. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 14 (hereafter cited as *PESC*).

9. An obvious example is Simmel, "Pace of Life and the Money Economy." Important as well is Walter Benjamin's distinction between empty and homogeneous time, on the one hand, and the more spontaneous and meaningful "now time," on the other ("Theses on the Philosophy of History," 263). Furthermore, Benjamin distinguishes between what he calls *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis*: arguing that modern capitalism and consumption culture alienate the subject from history, he observes that this subject has fewer and fewer meaningful *Erfahrungen* and more and more brief, superficial, and commodified *Erlebnisse* ("Central Park," 159; "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," 178). For other critical analyses of temporality in modernity and late modernity, see Adam, *Time*; Giddens, *Consequences of Modernity*; and Koselleck, *Futures Past*.

10. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 25–38 (hereafter cited as *ODM*).

revolves around the idea that we have to use or fill our time as efficiently as possible. Again, the idea, already found in Marx, Lukács, and Weber, that the irrationality of modern societies is experienced as rational and necessary returns in Marcuse's radically formulated observations:

> [The productive apparatus that defines advanced industrial societies] imposes its economic and political requirements for defense and expansion on labor time and free time, on the material and intellectual culture. By virtue of the way it has organized its technological base, contemporary industrial society tends to be totalitarian. For "totalitarian" is not only a terroristic political coordination of society, but also a non-terroristic economic-technical coordination which operates through the manipulation of needs by vested interests. It thus precludes the emergence of an effective opposition against the whole. (*ODM*, 5)

Marcuse claims, in other words, that our experience of time is completely permeated by the demands of the capitalist system in which we live. The constitution of a better society, he therefore argues, follows from the transformation of "leisure" into "free time" (*ODM*, 257), an idea that he takes from Marx's statement in the *Grundrisse* that "free time transforms its possessor into a different Subject."[11]

Another example of this critical approach to temporality is found in *The Art of Loving*, in which Erich Fromm makes a similar point. Fromm does not explore the division of our lives into weeks of seven days, however, but criticizes how modern societies are "speeding up" and have turned time into a commodity that should be "used" as efficiently as possible:

> For modern man, patience is as difficult to practice as discipline and concentration. Our whole industrial system fosters exactly the opposite: quickness. All our machines are designed for quickness: the car and airplane bring us quickly to our destination—and the quicker the better. The machine which can produce the same quantity in half the time is twice as good as the older and slower one. Of course, there are important economic reasons for this. But, as in so many other aspects, human values have become determined by economic values. What is good for machines must be good for man—so goes the logic. Modern man thinks he loses something—time—when he does not do things quickly; yet he does not know what to do with the time he gains— except kill it.[12]

11. Marcuse quoting, in his own translation, from Marx's *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* (*ODM*, 245).

12. Fromm, *Art of Loving*, 92.

Again, we see Weber's observations return in the idea that time has to be used as efficiently as possible. Whereas Weber mainly argues that this results in a life emptied of spontaneity and joy and filled with constant work, however, Fromm observes that even at those moments when we do seem to "make" or "save" time, we have lost the ability to really do something or truly enjoy ourselves, since all our activities are determined by the economic structures under which we live.

Rosa

The theme of quickness and compression reappears, combined with the analyses of Marx, Lukács, Weber, Adorno, Fromm, and Marcuse, in Hartmut Rosa's recently developed critical analysis of what he calls "social acceleration." Unlike the six authors discussed above, Rosa focuses almost exclusively on the role that temporality plays in our lives. At the same time, he embeds his own thought in the tradition of Critical Theory: "It is my goal to delineate the outlines of a Critical Theory of acceleration. . . . In my view, a contemporary version of Critical Theory should be faithful to the original intentions of the founding fathers of this tradition—from Marx to Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse, but also to people like Walter Benjamin and Erich Fromm, and on to Habermas and Honneth."[13] Rosa outlines his Critical Theory of acceleration by distinguishing three social fields in which the process of acceleration takes place. The first of these is the "intentional, technical, and above all technological (i.e., machine-based) acceleration of goal-directed processes."[14] Regarding this field, Rosa mainly analyzes how transportation, communication, distribution, production, and consumption have accelerated immensely in modernity and have, for example, radically altered our experience of space: the fact that we can quickly communicate with people all over the world or travel to the other side of the globe by plane, for example, has made the world smaller in our experience.

Second, Rosa describes an acceleration of social change, which he defines as "an increase of the rate of decay of action-orienting experiences and expectations and as a contraction of the time periods that determine the present of respective functional, value, and action spheres" (*SA*, 76).[15] With reference to Hermann Lübbe and Reinhardt Koselleck, Rosa argues that our experience of the present is shaped by, on the one hand, a determined past and, on the other,

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13. Rosa, *Alienation and Acceleration*, 52.
14. Rosa, *Social Acceleration*, 71 (hereafter cited as *SA*).
15. See also Hongladarom, "Web of Time and the Dilemma of Globalization."

an undetermined future in which we can project expectations and decisions.[16] As Lübbe observes, "The dynamic of modern civilization . . . increases at once our reach into the future and the difficulty of finding reliable, future-oriented premises for conceptualizing future action."[17] From this perspective, Rosa argues that the acceleration of social change results in a "contraction of the present," in which the conditions that define our present, as well as our ideas about the past and future, change more and more, which results in the feeling that we constantly have to redefine our understanding of both and become subject to experiences of restlessness and instability (*SA*, 76–77).[18]

Third, Rosa discerns a form of acceleration concerning the "pace of life" that revolves around the experience of a *scarcity of time*: in contemporary Western societies, people do more and more things faster and simultaneously, he observes.[19] Like Fromm, Adorno, and Marcuse, Rosa furthermore argues that this feeling of a scarcity of time does not make people relax in the time they have saved; they actually experience a constant pressure to use or fill their saved time as efficiently as possible (*SA*, 78–79).

This brings us to the social and critical aspects of Rosa's theory, which follow from his observation that there is a paradox between the first and third forms of acceleration he discerns. If technological processes go faster, and more machines are developed to do things that human beings used to do at a much slower pace, then one could say that the pace of life would *decelerate*: we would have more time to really do the things we like and want (*SA*, 16, 78–80). Instead, he observes that our lives only accelerate more and leave us less time.

Rosa offers different explanations for this paradox. I want to briefly focus on one of these, since this brings him close to the tradition of Critical Theory regarding the experience of time. Rosa argues that capitalism "decouples" industrial work time from traditional time patterns of everyday life, and he develops three reasons for this process. First, he argues that the mechanical clock and its ability to measure time in a generalized manner separated wage labor "from the rhythms of nature that had structured social life, at least in the

16. See Koselleck, *Futures Past*.

17. See Lübbe, "Contraction of the Present," 177.

18. The idea that Western societies are characterized by sped-up, discontinued, and fragmented experiences that no longer form part of a larger whole or narrative has been vigorously defended in works focused on the postmodern era. See, e.g., Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*; Menzies, *No Time*; Virilio, *Speed and Politics*; and Vieira, "Connecting the New Political History."

19. See also Benthaus-Apel, *Zwischen Zeitbindung und Zeitautonomie*; Garhammer, *Wie Europäer ihre Zeit nutzen*.

temperate latitudes, for centuries if not millennia" (*SA*, 156). Time thereby gains an "empty" and "anonymous" character, as he observes in a Marxist fashion: "Time remains *without qualities* in the capitalist economy: it runs during the day and at night, in summers as in winters, at the same pace and in a linear fashion. And it is always true that an hour in which the machines stand still and nothing is worked on, transported, or sold is economically a lost hour" (*SA*, 165). Second, Rosa follows Adorno and Marcuse's analysis of free time and shows that "in the course of industrialization a strict and almost complete temporal and spatial separation of work and free time developed, which had wide-ranging consequences for the temporal experience and planning of individuals for the time structures of society as a whole" (*SA*, 166).

Third, the general and formulaic nature of "clock time" decoupled time from the object of work: no longer was the beginning and ending of work defined by the task at hand, but by the abstractly defined hours one had to work during a day (*SA*, 166), as Marx observed in *Capital* as well.

This *decoupling* of time from the material or natural conditions that used to define experiences of temporality results in the idea that temporal structures form an *ideology*, a web woven over the world or a veil covering that which is really going on. Indeed, Rosa implicitly refers several times to Lukács's notion of second nature. He states, for example, that "speed as an overriding norm is completely 'naturalized' in modern society—temporal norms and structures seem to be simply 'given,' they are never perceived as socially constructed and politically negotiable."[20] He adds, "Time is still experienced as a brute, natural given."[21] More specifically, how we experience time (as a scarce value that needs to be saved and used as efficiently as possible) has gained a logic of its own and appears to be rational, natural, and therefore not to be questioned.

Here Rosa takes the analyses of temporality developed above one step further and explores an aspect that he understands as specific to the late modern age in which we live: the linear understanding of time that arose with capitalist structures has become inefficient in contemporary Western societies. The logic of acceleration and the experience of a constant scarcity of time have resulted in a sense of existence in which work time is not defined anymore within the boundaries of eight hours a day but has become fluid and dominates almost every hour of the day, apart from specific schedules or boundaries. The logic of acceleration has, in other words, turned into an independent entity that

20. Rosa, *Alienation and Acceleration*, 58.
21. Rosa, *Alienation and Acceleration*, 62.

invades even those spheres that used to lie outside work time. Rosa expresses this idea by referring to Habermas's famous thesis about the "colonization of the lifeworld":[22]

> While at first the modern work world had to be protected from the traditions of the lifeworld in order to successfully establish its time regime and to enable social acceleration through rationalization within its boundaries, in the meantime the time orientation and time discipline thereby developed has penetrated so deeply into the everyday conduct of life and even the institutions of the lifeworld that an, as it were, "reverse colonization" has become possible. (*SA*, 172)

Like Marcuse, Rosa even goes so far as to characterize social acceleration as a "totalitarian force in and of modern society," since it "exerts pressure on the wills and actions of subjects" while being "inescapable" and "all-pervasive."[23] According to Rosa, "The incapacity to engage in long-term commitments and to develop a frame of time-resistant priorities and long-term goals frequently seems to lead to a paradoxical backlash in which the experience of frantic change and temporalized time gives way to the perception of 'frozen time' without (a meaningful) past and future and consequently of depressing inertia."[24] With this diagnosis of what he calls a "frenetic standstill"—a situation in which the subject experiences everything as changing and as moving and, furthermore, one in which the subject is permeated with the need to constantly change and move itself but *essentially* nothing changes or moves—the idea of an ideology of acceleration has been made complete.

Before analyzing the normative basis of Rosa's ideas, I should emphasize that he does not develop a conservative or reactionary critique by claiming that *all* acceleration, by definition, is wrong. His analyses show that processes of acceleration have had and still have countless positive results: technical acceleration, for example, has led to immense progress in the medical field and in the ability to share knowledge with people all over the world. Furthermore, acceleration of social change can be understood as an important factor in the development of more open societies in which subjects have the ability to freely develop themselves and are given the means to do this. Instead, Rosa criticizes only the forms of acceleration that cause suffering or distress or that could be characterized as pathological. I return to this last point below.

22. See Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, 355.
23. Rosa, *Alienation and Acceleration*, 61.
24. Rosa, "Social Acceleration," 101.

Part 2: The Normative Basis of a Critical Theory of Acceleration

Autonomy

As I have already mentioned, Rosa argues that his observations on temporality could and should be transformed into a Critical Theory of acceleration. One of the main aspects of the analyses developed by authors belonging to this tradition is the idea that the forms of thinking they criticize have turned into "second nature" or into an ideology, which implies that the mechanisms and structures that constitute the subject's unfreedom often remain unnoticed by this same subject. In the following passage Rosa emphasizes the importance of ideology-critique as well as the necessity of providing his theory with a firm normative basis:

> What are the guiding intentions of Critical Theory? Here, I would like to follow Axel Honneth in the suggestion that the identification of social pathologies is an overriding goal not just of Critical Theory, but of social philosophy in general. Now, for Critical Theorists, these pathologies cannot just be understood as functional distortions or dysfunctional workings of societies which endanger the (material and/or symbolic) reproduction of society, for this would undermine the possibility of (revolutionary) rapture and change in social production. Instead, authors in this tradition have always been motivated by normative considerations too. The norms which are applied for judging social institutions and structures, however, cannot be taken from some a-historical, extra-social standpoint. Instead, it is (in my view) real human suffering which is the normative starting point for Critical Theorists. . . . However, suffering is not identical to conscious opposition. Thus, it is always possible that social actors suffer without clearly knowing it: this is where critiques of *false consciousness* and *ideology* come in.[25]

Rosa observes, in other words, that one cannot just claim that acceleration is wrong if it makes people suffer: since the temporal conditions that govern our lives have turned into what he calls a "totalitarian force" and work "behind the backs of actors" (*SA*, 315)—having become second nature—these actors may not consciously realize that they are suffering or that they are governed. He therefore needs a theoretical and normatively binding yardstick to actually argue why modern societies have pathological qualities and if processes of acceleration have positive or negative influences. A critical social theory, in other

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25. Rosa, *Alienation and Acceleration*, 52.

words, needs a firm normative and theoretical basis to penetrate ideological ideas and thereby criticize social, cultural, political, and economic structures.[26]

In *Social Acceleration* the most explicit formulation of such a basis turns on the classic notion of autonomy. As Rosa observes: "The strongest foundation for a critical theory of acceleration remains modernity's *broken promise of autonomy*. If this promise once inspired and spurred on the project and ethos of modernity, it can no longer be redeemed in either its individual or its political form on account of the altered time structures of late modernity" (*SA*, 319). Holding true to the notion of autonomy as a normative basis of Critical Theory, one could argue that processes of acceleration are wrong if they harm the subject's ability to constitute an autonomous, firm self and that they should not be criticized if they do not harm this self or provide it with the stability to develop itself further. Rosa indeed formulates the critical potential of this concept as follows: "Social conditions which undermine our capacity at self-determination, which undercut our potentials for individual and collective autonomy, can and should be identified and criticized because they systematically disable people to realize their conceptions of the good."[27]

However, Rosa does not really develop this idea further by defining a solid notion of autonomy that may function as a critical yardstick in theories of social acceleration. I want to show in the following that, instead, his texts contain suggestions for two understandings of autonomy: the notion of a narrative identity and Honneth's theory of recognition. I will argue that both provide us with a promising normative basis for a Critical Theory of acceleration, and that a combination of the two results in a specific definition of *reification*, on which I focus in part 3 of this article.

Narrative Identity

The first normatively binding understanding of autonomy that can be found in Rosa's works is that of a narrative identity. I want to briefly focus on this understanding with the help of ideas developed by Paul Ricoeur and Alasdair MacIntyre. In *Oneself as Another* Ricoeur argues that the subject constitutes an identity by translating its past experiences, feelings, and emotions into a narrative, which it can project into the future as well. Ricoeur thereby stresses the importance of narrative fiction, which constitutes an imaginary space in

26. This idea famously formed the basis of Habermas's critique of Horkheimer and Adorno ("Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment"). Freyenhagen, on the other hand, argues that Adorno's philosophy shows that a critical theory can be entirely negative without having to present us with a normative notion of how things *should* be (*Adorno's Practical Philosophy*).

27. Rosa, *Alienation and Acceleration*, 53.

which we learn how to shape and think about our selves in narrative contexts: "The actions refigured by narrative fictions are complex ones, rich in anticipations of an ethical nature. Telling a story . . . is deploying an imaginary space for thought experiments in which moral judgment operates in a hypothetical mode."[28] In *After Virtue* MacIntyre develops a similar idea and argues that what he calls the "narrative unity of a life"[29] enables the self to make sense of its past, connect it to the present, and use this continuity to develop an understanding of the future:

> Man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal. He is not essentially, but becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth. But the key question for men is not about their own authorship; I can only answer the question "What am I to do?" if I can answer the prior question "Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?"[30]

Ricoeur indeed observes that, in both his and MacIntyre's philosophy, "the idea of gathering together one's life in the form of a narrative is destined to serve as a basis for the aim of a 'good' life."[31]

Thus both Ricoeur and MacIntyre stress that the theory of a narrative identity implies that the subject has to be able to *actively* shape its own life into a meaningful narrative and to use this narrative as a moral background to think of and about itself when it makes decisions. This understanding of personhood provides the subject with autonomy and requires reflection on and a grasp of oneself as an acting and spontaneous being. The British neurologist Oliver Sacks elegantly expresses this same idea:

> If we wish to know about a man, we ask "what is his story—his real, inmost story?"—for each of us *is* a biography, a story. Each of us *is* a singular narrative, which is constructed, continually, unconsciously, by, through, and in us—through our perceptions, our feelings, our thoughts, our actions; and, not least, our discourse, our spoken narrations. Biologically, physiologically, we are not so different from each other; historically, as narratives—we are each of us unique. To be ourselves we must *have* ourselves—possess, if need be re-possess, our life-stories. We must "recollect" ourselves, recollect the inner drama, the narrative, of ourselves. A man *needs* such a narrative, a continuous inner narrative, to maintain his identity, his self.[32]

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28. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 170.
29. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 258.
30. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 216.
31. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 158.
32. Sacks, *Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, 110–11.

In other words, this understanding of the subject is based on the idea that temporality and the experience of oneself as a being with a past, present, and future, form a necessary condition for selfhood, for autonomy, and even for what Ricoeur calls a "good life." Accordingly, only if a subject is able to shape its life into a narrative, and embed its experiences, memories, and past activities in one unity, can that subject provide its life with meaning and continue the development of this narrative in the future.

This notion of a narrative identity is mainly referred to by Rosa in descriptions of the harm that processes of social acceleration do to the subject. In several places, he argues that we develop a healthy, autonomous self only if we can position ourselves within a sociocultural and spatiotemporal whole that provides our lives and our sense of self with meaning and continuity. An important aspect of this is the idea that one has to be able to think of one's life as a narrative. Rosa observes: "In every identity-constituting, narratively constructed life history it is not only the case that the past is reconstructed; at one and the same time the present is interpreted and a possible future is projected" (*SA*, 146).[33]

Given Rosa's observation that as both the pace of life and cultural changes accelerate in late modernity, it becomes more and more difficult for the subject to make its past experiences into its own narrative. Instead, Rosa argues, the self collapses into what he calls a "situational identity" (*SA*, 231–50), characterized not only by flexibility and adaptability to ever-changing contexts and situations but also by instability and fragmentation. Since this subject constantly needs to adapt itself to changing contexts, options, possibilities, and living styles, it ends up in a "drifting state" (*SA*, 244) in which it cannot transform all its rather contingent experiences into a meaningful and linear narrative. This, in turn, results in a "loss of autonomy and control over one's own life" (*SA*, 243), during which one becomes almost enslaved to the random changes that happen around oneself:

> The project of modernity is centered on the idea that persons can and should themselves take responsibility for the progressive shaping of their individual lives (ethical autonomy). . . . Yet the new experience of time is constitutively related to the feeling of a loss of autonomy that is manifested in the disappearance of any possibility of control and the erosion of opportunities to shape one's own affairs. It leads *individually* to the experience of a drift, or, put positively, of situationally open play. (*SA*, 294)

33. See also Rosa, *Alienation and Acceleration*, 97.

The constantly changing contexts in which the subject finds itself thrown, as it were, do not provide a stable enough situation that makes it possible to understand one's self as existing in a continuous development, beginning with one's ideas about the past and ending with one's expectations of and plans for the future.

Using the notion of a narrative identity as a critical yardstick, in other words, allows Rosa in passages like these not only to rely on the actual suffering of human beings but also to claim on a more theoretical level that processes of acceleration are wrong *if* they obstruct or undermine the subject's capacity to form a narrative identity and so constitute itself as an autonomous individual.

Recognition

The second understanding of autonomy that Rosa refers to in his texts is taken from Axel Honneth's theory of social recognition. Rosa observes in *Alienation and Acceleration*, again placing himself in the tradition of Critical Theory:

> As the struggle for recognition in a competitive society is a constant driving force of social acceleration itself, it changes its form significantly with the increasing speed of social change. Unless this temporal dimension is taken into account, the logic of this struggle cannot be fully grasped. Therefore, a Critical Theory of the conditions of recognition is inherently connected to a Critical Theory of social acceleration, too; in fact, it could be an essential part of the latter.[34]

This is an interesting suggestion, since notions of time, temporality, or acceleration do not play an essential role in Honneth's philosophy. Combining Rosa's and Honneth's ideas, in other words, creates the opportunity to provide the latter's analysis of recognition with a temporal dimension. I return to this observation below.

When Rosa references Honneth, he mainly focuses on *The Struggle for Recognition*, in which Honneth analyzes the notion of recognition as it appears in the "Jena writings" of Hegel. Honneth observes that "the various patterns of recognition distinguished by Hegel could be conceptualized as the intersubjective conditions under which human subjects reach various new ways of relating positively to themselves."[35] Drawing on an interpretation of these writings, Honneth argues that the self can be fully developed and constituted only if

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34. Rosa, *Alienation and Acceleration*, 61.
35. Honneth, *Struggle for Recognition*, 173 (hereafter cited as *SR*).

this process takes place in an ethical context in which it is able to form three types of relations: relations of love, of law, and of ethical life. This results in the idea not only that certain intersubjective conditions are required to form personal integrity and autonomy but also that these conditions can be approached as providing us with norms regarding the construction of a good and just social whole (*SR*, 144): "A formal conception of ethical life encompasses the qualitative conditions for self-realization that, insofar as they form general prerequisites for the personal integrity of subjects, can be distracted from the plurality of all particular forms of life" (*SR*, 175).

Regarding the first sphere of relations—love and care—Honneth explores the following observation: "For Hegel, love represents the first stage of reciprocal recognition, because in it subjects mutually confirm each other with regard to the concrete nature of their needs and thereby recognize each other as needy creatures" (*SR*, 95). Through the love it receives, a child eventually learns the value of "being oneself in another," which, in Honneth's view, "represents the model for all more mature forms of love" (*SR*, 100). Regarding the sphere of law, Honneth argues that if one is recognized as a person who has certain inalienable rights, "one is able to view oneself as a person who shares with all other members of one's community the qualities that make participation in discursive will-formation possible. And we can term the possibility of relating positively to oneself in this manner 'self-respect'" (*SR*, 120).

Following Hegel and Mead, Honneth then distinguishes a third form of recognition: social esteem, which allows one to relate positively to one's concrete traits and abilities (*SR*, 121). This third sphere refers, in modern societies, to the value that is placed on individuality and equality; it is constituted through recognition of the ability to develop oneself as a person according to one's own characteristic talents and capabilities. Honneth uses the term *solidarity* to characterize the interhuman bonds that are constituted in this third sphere, and stresses the importance of autonomy in this context:

> In modern societies . . . social relations of symmetrical esteem between individualized (and autonomous) subjects represent a prerequisite for solidarity. In this sense, to esteem one another symmetrically means to view one another in light of values that allow the abilities and traits of the other to appear significant for shared praxis. Relationships of this sort can be said to be cases of "solidarity," because they inspire not just passive tolerance but felt concern for what is individual and particular about the other person. For only to the degree to which I actively care about the development of the other's characteristics (which seem foreign to me) can our shared goals be realized. (*SR*, 129)

Rosa suggests that it is this form of autonomy that could be used as a critical yardstick and as a normatively binding basis for his Critical Theory of acceleration. He observes in *Social Acceleration*:

> The critique of temporal relations at which I aim can in fact be linked up with the critique of relations of recognition proposed by Honneth: if social exclusion as the experience of disrespect leads to subjective suffering, then in modern society one can clearly discern a progressive dynamization of exclusion-induced suffering. There is no doubt that this produces fear and anxiety in those who are not (or not yet) excluded. It therefore decisively shapes the action orientations of individuals, because the premodern experience of being excluded on categorical grounds (for instance, in the denial of specific rights and forms of esteem to certain classes or "estates") is replaced in modernity by the constantly present, fear-inducing possibility of becoming excluded in the sense of "getting left behind." Almost every form of social recognition (with the exception perhaps of the legal dimension) increasingly stands under temporal qualification: love and friendship come to be viewed as contingent and conditional arrangements and personal achievement must be ceaselessly renewed and improved if it is not to lose its function of securing social esteem. This may be one of the essentially subject-related causes of the oft-observed restlessness of modern societies and the dominance of a rhetoric of "must" that contradicts their ideology of freedom. (*SA*, 316–17)

Social acceleration, Rosa suggests, can be characterized as "wrong" *if* it undermines and corrodes stable forms of social recognition and reduces them to fragmentary, superficial, and unreliable forms of contact between subjects.[36] Relying on Honneth's analysis of social recognition, Rosa argues that certain forms of acceleration may disrupt recognitional processes, which is wrong because these processes are necessary for the constitution of an autonomous subject.

Part 3: Reification and Remembrance

Combining Both Understandings of Autonomy
In the following I want to argue that these two suggestions for a normative basis of Rosa's Critical Theory of acceleration—autonomy understood as a narrative identity and autonomy as shaped by processes of recognition—can be combined to develop a new understanding of the concept of reification. The idea that both can be combined is implicitly suggested by Honneth himself in a

36. For an analysis of the empirical effect that this has on the practice of education, see Walker, "Time as the Fourth Dimension."

paper titled "Decentred Autonomy," in which he defends the following defini-
tion of *autonomy*: "A certain degree of psychical maturity is what allows sub-
jects to organize their lives as unique biographies, taking their individual incli-
nations and needs into consideration."[37] This means, Honneth goes on, that
autonomy presupposes two qualities of human action. The first is "the transpar-
ency of our desires and the intentionality of meaning."[38] The second, derived
from the first, is a normative idea of individual autonomy: "Only a person
who is in a position to disclose needs creatively, to present his or her entire life
in an ethically reflected way, and to apply universalist norms in a context-
sensitive manner, can be regarded as an autonomous person."[39]

Autonomy, in Honneth's view, is intrinsically bound up in self-reflection
and the ability not only to oversee one's own needs and desires but also to pre-
sent one's past as a linear narrative in which ideals and norms have played a
guiding role. These ideals furthermore shape one's plans for the future and
guide one's actions and sense of self. This ability is structured by the processes
of recognition that have shaped one as an autonomous person: one can reflect on
one's needs and present them as part of a narrative biography only if they have
been recognized as needs in the contexts in which one has grown up. Both
social recognition and the ability to understand one's life as a narrative whole,
in other words, form the basis of this understanding of autonomy.

In the following, I want to put more flesh on the bones of this notion of
autonomy, and thus show how it may function as a normative yardstick, by
arguing that it results in a specific understanding of the term *reification*.
According to the reading that I want to develop, reification can be understood
as the negative result of the undermining of both a narrative identity and the
processes of social recognition, and is linked to notions of temporality and
remembrance.

Reification

The idea of redefining reification was sparked by Honneth's own discussion of
the concept in his 2005 Berkeley Tanner Lectures. One of the main arguments
Honneth develops in these lectures is that three spheres of recognition,
described in *The Struggle for Recognition*, contain an element of *cognition*,
since they are based on the ability to understand others as beings with certain
needs and capabilities. He then claims that a specific type of recognition pre-

37. Honneth, "Decentered Autonomy," 185.
38. Honneth, "Decentered Autonomy," 185.
39. Honneth, "Decentered Autonomy," 191.

cedes these cognitive dealings with the world. How we think about the world
and develop conceptual structures to understand and grasp it, Honneth claims,
are made possible by a more fundamental or elementary form of connection
that transcends the recognitional patterns described above:

> Without the experience that other individuals are fellow humans, we would be
> incapable of equipping [the existential scheme of experience] with moral val-
> ues that guide and limit our actions. Therefore, elementary recognition must
> be carried out, and we must feel existential sympathy for the other, before we
> can learn to orient ourselves toward norms of recognition that compel us to
> express certain specific forms of concern or benevolence. The implication for
> the structure of my own theory of recognition is that I must insert a stage of
> recognition before the previously discussed forms, one that represents a kind
> of transcendental condition. The spontaneous, nonrational recognition of oth-
> ers as fellow human beings thus forms a necessary condition for appropriating
> moral values in the light of which we recognize the other in a certain norma-
> tive manner.[40]

At times Honneth refers to Adorno to make his point about the form of recog-
nition he discusses, as in this instance:

> I would like to point out in passing that Theodor W. Adorno made some sim-
> ilar remarks in certain places in his works—above all in *Minima Moralia* and
> *Negative Dialectics*. Formulations can be found again and again in these texts
> which indicate that Adorno . . . recognized that the human mind arises out of
> an early imitation of a loved figure of attachment. Indeed, he states in a well-
> known aphorism from *Minima Moralia* that a person doesn't become a person
> until he or she imitates other persons. Immediately afterward he writes that
> this kind of imitation constitutes the "archetype of love." (*R*, 44–45)

Following Horkheimer and Adorno's statement in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*
that "all reification is forgetting," Honneth then argues in his Tanner Lectures
that reification should be understood as a "forgetfulness" of the precognitive
stance of recognition, described above, that transcends all other forms of rec-
ognition: "To the extent to which in our acts of cognition we lose sight of the
fact that these acts owe their existence to our having taken up an antecedent
recognitional stance, we develop a tendency to perceive other persons as mere
insensate objects. By speaking here of mere objects or 'things,' I mean that in
this kind of amnesia, we lose the ability to understand immediately the behav-

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40. Honneth, *Reification*, 152–53 (hereafter cited as *R*).

ioural expressions of other persons as making claims on us—as demanding that we react in an appropriate way" (*R*, 58).

Honneth compares the worldview that is the result of this forgetfulness or amnesia with that of "the autistic child's world of perception, as a totality of merely observable objects lacking all psychic impulse or emotion" (*R*, 58). Reification, in other words, consists of a turning away from our precognitive ways of experiencing others and results in a denial of the other subject's existence as human (*R*, 76). In all these cases, Honneth argues, human beings are approached as things, which follows from a forgetfulness of our initial feelings of recognition toward either ourselves or others.

Temporality and Reification

Even though I am sympathetic to Honneth's attempt to provide the concept of reification with a new meaning and link it to his own philosophy of recognition, I do not see why he needs to connect it to a sharp dualism between cognitive and noncognitive forms of approaching others. Why could it not be possible, after all, to argue that if we reify someone, we fail to approach that person as an autonomous individual, which could in fact be a cognitive process or at least a process that contains cognitive or rational aspects? Or why could noncognitive approaches to human beings not contain reifying elements as well, like sadistic feelings or motives characterized by hatred, disgust, or ignorance?[41] By analyzing reification in the context of a discussion of cognitive and noncognitive processes, Honneth overlooks the ambivalent and particular nature of the processes of reification and, more generally, of subjectivity. These processes, I furthermore want to argue, should always be approached as taking place in specific and particular historical circumstances: Honneth's analysis—especially his comparison with an autistic worldview—suggests that the opposite of reification consists of a return to a certain state and therefore comes dangerously close to an essentialist notion of "healthy" and "unhealthy" ways of relating to the world, in which "healthy" is associated with "precognitive" processes and "unhealthy" with a cognitive approach to the world and others that is pathologized by linking it to a state that is presented as a developmental disorder.[42]

I therefore aim to argue that reification and ways of criticizing reification are historical processes that are always tied to specific historical situations. Furthermore, I want to claim that they also always contain cognitive elements.

41. This second point is made in Lear, "Slippery Middle."
42. For a strong critique of Honneth's interpretation of reification along these lines, see Jütten, "What Is Reification?"

This point can be made by looking at the actual passage in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in which Horkheimer and Adorno observe that "all reification is forgetting." Horkheimer and Adorno make this observation after citing a letter by the French physiologist Pierre Flourens (1794–1867), a pioneer in studies of anesthesia. In this letter Flourens confesses that he does not want to use chloroform to anesthetize people, since his experiments on animals show that the main effect of chloroform may be that while the subject does not afterward remember the impressions experienced under the anesthesia, the pain may be more intense in the anesthetic state. The only effect of chloroform, in other words, might be a forgetting of the pain that one suffered, not a reduction of this pain. Adorno and Horkheimer then comment:

> If Flourens were right in this letter, the obscure workings of the world's divine governance would at least for once be justified. The animal would be avenged by the sufferings of its executioner: each operation a vivisection. A suspicion would arise that our attitude toward human beings, and toward all creatures, is no different to that toward ourselves after a successful operation: blindness to torment. For cognition, the space separating us from others would mean the same thing as the time between us and the suffering in our own past: an insurmountable barrier. But the perennial dominion over nature, medical and nonmedical technology, derives its strength from such blindness; it would be made possible only by oblivion. Loss of memory as the transcendental condition of science. All reification is forgetting.[43]

This complex passage has several implications and can be interpreted on different levels. Horkheimer and Adorno argue that the attitude that characterizes science is based on a gap between ourselves and other creatures. This gap might enable us, for example, to defend the Cartesian idea that the animals we experiment on are mere things that do not feel anything. This gap, in other words, makes it possible to shut out feelings of compassion with the suffering that these experiments cause and to reify these creatures: to approach them as mere things. It is this understanding of reification on which Honneth mainly bases his critique of cognition and his defense of a precognitive, existential form of recognition.

    However, I think that Honneth overlooks the different layers that this passage contains, and misrepresents the authors by claiming that they criticize cognition in general. Instead, I believe that Horkheimer and Adorno target specific aspects or tendencies of cognition, which found their most extreme radicaliza-

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43. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 191.

tion in the irrational form of rationality that they point at in their analysis of Nazi Germany. They understand this irrational rationality as a perversion of the form of rationality that came into being with enlightenment thought, a perversion driven by the irrational elements that were *already* part of the rational self. This does not mean, however, that the authors reject cognition or rationality in general. Instead, they aim to show that both contain irrational elements and can turn into instruments of control, even of torture, if their violent tendencies are not criticized and reflected on. Adorno and Horkheimer, therefore, emphasize the dialectical nature of rationality and show that rationality and irrationality are entwined.

This ambivalence can be illustrated by two long passages in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which both revolve around the notion of time. The first goes as follows:

> The world of animals is without concepts. There is no word to hold fast the identical in the flux of phenomena, the same genus in the succession of specimens, the same thing in changing situations. Although the possibility of recognition is not absent, identification is restricted to vital patterns. There is nothing in the flux that could be defined as lasting, and yet everything remains one and the same, because there is no fixed knowledge of the past and no clear prospect into the future. The animal responds to its name and has no self, it is enclosed in itself yet exposed, one compulsion is followed by another, no idea extends beyond it. Its loss of solace is not balanced by a reduction in fear, its lack of awareness of happiness by the absence of mourning and pain. For happiness to become substantial, for life to be endowed with death, identifying remembrance is needed, assuaging knowledge, the religious or philosophical idea, in short, the concept. There are happy animals, but how short-lived is that happiness! The animal's experience of duration, uninterrupted by liberating thought, is dreary and depressive. To escape the gnawing emptiness of existence some resistance is needed, and its backbone is language. Even the strongest animal is infinitely feeble. Schopenhauer's doctrine according to which the pendulum of life oscillates between pain and boredom, between brief moments of sated impulse and endless craving, is true of the animal, which cannot interrupt the fatal cycle with cognition. In the animal's soul the individual feelings and needs of human beings are vestigially present, without the stability which only organizing reason confers. The best days flit past in a bustling medley like a dream, which the animal can hardly distinguish from waking in any case. It is without the clear division between play and seriousness, the happy awakening from nightmare to reality.[44]

44. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 205.

In this passage, several themes discussed in parts 1 and 2 return. Horkheimer and Adorno here argue that cognition does have a positive aspect and elevates us to a level at which we can reflect on ourselves. Implicitly, they thereby foreground the notion of a "narrative identity": our ability to reflect on ourselves makes it possible to construct our lives as narratives, to connect the past to the present, and to find meaning and perhaps even happiness in our lives. This turns us into autonomous beings in control of who and what we are and can oversee our feelings, needs, and experiences. Furthermore, Schopenhauer's reflections on the cycle of desire and satisfaction (resulting in boredom) return here, and Horkheimer and Adorno argue that this cycle characterizes the behavior of animals, not of autonomous subjects. Furthermore, Adorno's references to Schopenhauer's observations on time, mentioned at the outset of this article, imply that capitalist structures reduce the subject to the powerless, animalistic state that he and Horkheimer describe. Perhaps they had the following statement by Marx in mind: "Political economy knows the worker only as a working-animal—as a beast reduced to the strictest bodily needs."[45]

The second passage in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that is relevant here can be found in Adorno's interpretation of the *Odyssey*, in which he emphasizes the problematic dimensions of the ability to reflect on oneself:

> Book XII of the Odyssey tells how Odysseus sailed past the Sirens. Their allurement is that of losing oneself in the past. But the hero exposed to it has come of age in suffering. In the multitude of mortal dangers which he has had to endure, the unity of his own life, the identity of the person, have been hardened. The realms of time have been separated for him like water, earth, and air. The tide of what has been has receded from the rock of the present, and the future lies veiled in cloud on the horizon. What Odysseus has left behind him has passed into the world of shades: so close is the self to the primeval myth from whose embrace it has wrested itself that its own lived past becomes a mythical prehistory. It seeks to combat this by a fixed order of time. The tripartite division is intended to liberate the present moment from the power of the past by banishing the latter beyond the absolute boundary of the irrecoverable and placing it, as usable knowledge, in the service of the present.[46]

As Adorno develops a genealogy of the modern subject, he argues that this subject is born out of the drive for self-preservation. The ability to rationally reflect on ourselves, others, and the world, he claims, is based on the need to control

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45. Marx and Engels, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 29.
46. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 25.

those aspects of ourselves and the world that may form a threat to this self, including that which he calls "the primeval prehistory" of the subject's "lived past." To form an autonomous self, in other words, the modern subject had to control and suppress certain aspects of itself. And the sense of time, which comes into being with the ability to reflect on oneself, is based on this same need to control and oversee and can therefore quickly turn into repression, Adorno observes. As we have seen, a similar analysis of the repressive workings of temporal structures and the introduction of "the clock" was developed by Marx and Weber.

Both passages from *Dialectic of Enlightenment* stress the idea that reflection enables the subject to structure its life, to form it into a narrative and thereby to become autonomous. Whereas the first passage emphasizes the positive aspects of this ability, the second highlights its negative tendencies. To claim, therefore, that the forgetfulness that Horkheimer and Adorno link to reification is a forgetfulness of precognitive forms of recognition, as Honneth does, is to overlook the critical and reflective elements of cognition and reason that Horkheimer and Adorno praise, as well as the negative aspects of irrational experiences that they criticize. And, as I now will argue, this means that reification should be understood, within the context of Adorno and Horkheimer's text, as a process that undermines an understanding of autonomy intrinsically linked to temporality, narrativity, and recognition.

A Remembrance of Things Past

I start by exploring the idea that Adorno and Horkheimer's emphasis on the notion of forgetfulness makes it possible to combine analyses of reifying processes with an emphasis on the temporal dimension of individuality that I have discussed with regard to narrative identity. Forgetting, after all, is a process that is intrinsically linked to time: if we forget something, we cannot remember an experience or event that lies in the past. And the more we forget, the more we live in a "perpetual present" unconnected to the narrative lines that have led up to and that have shaped this present. The more we forget, in other words, the more we turn into a subject without a narrative, which implies that progressive memory loss leads us toward becoming ahistorical or timeless things, and toward a development of the situational identity that Rosa criticizes.

This has implications for an understanding of autonomy that, in my view, can be based on these ideas. Horkheimer and Adorno's account of animal consciousness implies that the subject becomes autonomous only when it has recollected its own past. It does this not by structuring its life into an abstract past,

present, and future, which would allow it to control and repress its past and to disconnect itself from its memories, but by *actively* working through its past. The best example of this form of remembrance is perhaps Marcel Proust's masterwork, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, which Adorno praises at several places for recollecting experiences of happiness and for struggling with the act of forgetting.[47] In this work the Narrator eventually finds himself and reaches autonomy as a writer after a detailed process of actively working through his own past experiences, reflecting on the history of his own needs, feelings, embodiment, impressions, ideals, norms, thoughts, and the cultural values and mores of his time.[48]

Since Horkheimer and Adorno claim that the self is always permeated with and formed by social, cultural, and historical categories, the understanding of reification that I want to develop also implies that autonomy is constituted if one works in a similar way through the history of one's culture: not in a distant and controlling manner by structuring one's life and disconnecting oneself from the past, but in an *active* way by exploring the genealogy of one's ideas, norms, ideals, and faculty of reason. I have taken the phrase *working through the past* from a lecture that Adorno gave in Wiesbaden in 1959, and later repeated on a radio broadcast, called "What Does Working Through the Past Mean?" ("Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit?").[49] In this lecture Adorno explores how, in his view, postwar Germany should treat its past and think about the horrors that took place under the National Socialist regime. Exploring the difficulties and dangers inherent in such a project, he develops a pedagogy, based on Freudian psychoanalysis, that is aimed at mak-

47. See, e.g., Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 378; and Adorno, *Metaphysics*, 140–42. For a helpful analysis of temporality in Proust's work, see Kristeva, *Proust and the Sense of Time*. See also Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 160.

48. Developing an interpretation of Adorno's philosophy of time, Espen Hammer makes a similar point about the role that the notion of a narrative identity might play in the constitution of an autonomous and free self. In relation to a discussion of Tolstoy's *Death of Ivan Ilyich*, he observes: "Without the capacity for narrative, in which the narrator works out both what he (perhaps despite appearances) can take himself to have been the author of and what was merely the result of thoughtlessness, lack of reflection, or mere conformity to prevailing conventions and attitudes, it would not be possible to cultivate a free self and sense of selfhood" (*Philosophy and Temporality*, 224). Following a reading of Bloch, Benjamin, and Adorno, Hammer emphasizes the importance of sudden experiences, claiming that their unexpectedness might counter both the emptiness of homogeneous time or "clock-time" (criticized by Marx and Lukács, for example) and the randomness and discontinuity of postmodern conceptions of time. Only these experiences, which Hammer links to Adorno's analyses of aesthetic and natural beauty, constitute meaning, enabling the subject to break through its reified shell and undergo a sense of "otherness" (*Philosophy and Temporality*, 240). Even though I am sympathetic to Hammer's argument, in this article I want to emphasize the importance of a continuous narrativity, of self-reflection and remembrance instead of experiences of an unexpected and surprising nature.

49. Adorno, "Meaning of Working Through the Past."

ing people aware of the subjective and objective conditions—both psychological tendencies and the economic and political structure of society—that underlie anti-Semitism, hatred, and violence. He thereby stresses the cognitive and reflective aspects of this project: "It seems to me . . . that what is conscious could never prove so fateful as what remains unconscious, half-conscious, or preconscious. Essentially it is a matter of the way in which the past is made present; whether one remains at the level of reproach or whether one withstands the horror by having the strength to comprehend even the incomprehensible."[50] Furthermore, Adorno links this process to the idea of a *public enlightenment* and to the reinforcement of a person's self:

> As far as wanting to combat anti-Semitism in individual subjects is concerned, one should not expect too much from the recourse to facts, which anti-Semites most often will either not admit or will neutralize by treating them as exceptions. Instead one should apply the argumentation directly to the subjects whom one is addressing. They should be made aware of the mechanisms that cause racial prejudice within them. A working through of the past understood as enlightenment is essentially such a turn toward the subject, the reinforcement of a person's self-consciousness and hence also of his self.[51]

We should bear in mind that, to an important extent, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* revolves around the idea that the suffering and horrors that took place under the National Socialist regime were not an anomaly but should be understood as radicalizations of the tendencies inherent in the form of reason that came into being with enlightenment thought and that are still present in modern societies. This means that autonomy may be reached in modernity if the modern subject actively works through the horrors that took place in the past. Instead of disconnecting oneself from these horrors, pushing them into a premodern history, and thereby absolving oneself from the responsibility of understanding what happened and why it happened, one should remember past suffering and understand it as part of the narrative that has shaped modern subjectivity and one's self, forming, then, a key aspect of autonomy.[52]

50. Adorno, "Meaning of Working Through the Past," 100.
51. Adorno, "Meaning of Working Through the Past," 102.
52. As examples of this type of remembrance, we might think of documentaries like Joshua Oppenheimer's 2012 *Act of Killing*, about the mass killings in Indonesia in 1956 and 1966, and Rithy Panh's 2013 *Missing Picture*, about the Khmer Rouge. Both documentaries actively explore and work through suffering that took place in the past and connect it to how people living in these societies, including the perpetrators, now think about, represent, and remember this suffering. Other explorations of this idea can be found in Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*; and Rothberg, "After Apartheid, beyond Filiation."

To use Horkheimer and Adorno's analogy: by removing the anesthetic veil of chloroform that pushes (one's) suffering into a distant past, remembrance results in an awareness of feelings and needs, of the self-preservation and anxiety that lie at the origins of the modern subject, and of the suffering that took place in the past. In a sense, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as a whole could be understood as such an act of critical remembrance, since the authors actively and critically work through the past of the modern subject and of modern societies.

The fact that the self-critical awareness of one's past has a reflective and cognitive nature again implies that reification is not purely based on cognitive processes or a forgetting of a precognitive stance toward others. Put in the context of the example of Flourens, if the subject realizes that its self partly rests on a forgetfulness of suffering, and thereby recognizes its own aversion to suffering, it might be able to open itself up toward the compassionate idea that animals are vulnerable to suffering as well.

Forgetfulness and Autonomy

This understanding of autonomy brings us back to Rosa's notion of a frenetic standstill and a situational identity, based on the idea that certain processes of social acceleration may result in an underlying stasis covered by a veil of ever-changing developments. It allows us to claim that the chaotic nature of these processes of acceleration have a reifying effect on the subject, since this subject is reduced to a ready-made "thing" without history, narrative, or biography, which undermines its ability to reach autonomy because it cannot connect anymore to what Adorno and Horkheimer call a "lived past."

It is important to observe that Honneth's idea of autonomy as an awareness of one's own needs and experiences is also affirmed by this analysis of reification. While Honneth mainly attends to the needs that one has in the present, which have to be recognized by oneself and by others to form a healthy, autonomous self, the focus on temporality spurred by Horkheimer and Adorno, and emphasized from a critical perspective by Rosa, provides this self with a historical dimension. To reach autonomy, one has to be able to recognize and work through the needs one had in the past as well as the present needs on which one's self rests. Following Honneth's theory of recognition, this idea could be conceptualized in intersubjective terms: reifying a person means disrespecting or not recognizing the narratives that have shaped that person's life.

In *After Virtue* MacIntyre develops a similar idea: "It is because we all live out narratives in our lives and because we understand our own lives in

terms of the narratives that we live out that the form of narrative is appropriate for understanding the actions of others."[53] Moreover, "the narrative of any one life is part of an interlocking set of narratives. . . . Asking you what you did and why, saying what I did and why, pondering the differences between your account of what I did and my account of what I did, and *vice versa*, these are essential constituents of all but the very simplest and barest of narratives."[54] In other words: if one recognizes the temporal dimensions of other subjects and remains aware of every self as the product of a long history of experiences, feelings, and ideas grounded in the self's body and mind, as well as in its formative culture and society, then one is prepared to treat others as autonomous beings.

Conclusion

In his lectures on reification, Honneth makes the following observation:

> Adorno emphasized more than any other writer the fact that the appropriateness and quality of our conceptual thought is dependent upon the degree to which we are capable of remaining conscious of the original connection of our thought to an object of desire—a beloved person or thing. He even regarded the memory of this antecedent act of recognition as providing a kind of guarantee that a given act of cognition has not constructed its object but has grasped it in all its concrete particularity. (*R*, 57)

I want to summarize the understanding of reification that I have developed above by arguing that Honneth overlooks an important aspect of Adorno's philosophy: Adorno does indeed criticize the idea that cognition and conceptual thought are not completely able to grasp the object. However, that means not that he aims to return to a precognitive, rather ahistorical form of experience but merely that the cognitive self has to be aware of its own limited nature and has to criticize the idea that reason can completely unravel the world. Adorno, in other words, mainly argues that the subject has to be aware of the history that the subject has gone through after this initial connection to the object.

Instead of returning to a beginning, the self has to work through its own narrative to become aware of its nature and to be critical of it at the same time. Instead of returning to the mythical oneness between Odysseus's desires and the Sirens' fatal allure, the subject has to work through the process that enabled Odysseus to elevate himself out of nature and to reach autonomy, thereby

53. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 211–12.
54. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 218.

focusing on both the negative and the positive aspects of this emancipation. The essentialist idea of a return would overlook the idea that every experiencing self has gone through a process and is based on a narrative, and that reaching autonomy is a temporal and reflective process that can be achieved in modernity only if we work through the past by simultaneously looking forward.

Furthermore, my interpretation of reification suggests that the "concrete particularity" that Adorno refers to, and that Honneth mentions as well, includes the temporal dimensions of other beings. Put as a more universal moral demand: recognizing oneself or other people in a nonreified manner, and therefore as autonomous creatures, means that one actively seeks to understand why people have become the selves that they are, which past experiences have shaped them, and in what way their existence follows from their biographical narratives. Functioning as a normative basis within a critical theory of social acceleration, this means that processes of acceleration are wrong if they damage the ability to actively work through the past of oneself, of others, and of the culture and society in which one is embedded. It is again important to emphasize that this does not mean that all processes of acceleration are wrong; this understanding of autonomy provides us with a critical yardstick to determine if processes of acceleration have positive or negative influences.

Following this suggestion, I believe that the critique of socially constructed understandings of "time" and temporal conditions in the works of Marx, Lukács, Weber, Fromm, Marcuse, Adorno, Horkheimer, and Rosa can be turned into a fruitful basis for a Critical Theory that revolves around reification understood as a forgetting of one's history, temporality, and narrativity.

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