

DISENCHANTMENT REDUX

Marx, the Frankfurt School, and the Critique of Ideology

ELIZABETH PORTELLA AND ÓSCAR RALDA

Criticism has plucked the imaginary flowers from the chain, not in order that [humankind] shall bear the chain without caprice or consolation but so that [they] will cast off the chain and pluck the living flower.

– Karl Marx, “Introduction to the Critique of Hegel’s
Philosophy of Right,” 1843

‘Disenchantment’ has, for many, described the decisive problematization of such notions as social totality and ideology. In this paper, we will argue that this ‘disenchantment’ with ideology in the history of philosophy has not exhausted the concept’s critical force. Rather, we argue that *disenchantment in the form of ideology critique* retains the normative force to critique the historical conditions that have produced that very category. We claim, however, that the concept of ‘disenchantment’ itself can also operate ideologically in such a way that it undermines the critical potential of the concept; its ideological appearance is perhaps the most common use of the term today. Contrary to these more recent uses and misreadings of the term, the concept of disenchantment is not antithetical to the notion of social totality. Further, it is precisely this obfuscation of social contradiction as a totality that allows the concept to function ideologically. Drawing on the work of Marx, Adorno, and contemporary critical theorists, we aim to survey the

status of ideology critique with special attention to its function as a kind of ‘disenchantment’ with the present social order. In other words, rather than tracking disenchantment *at the level of the concept*, we will demonstrate that the fundamental contradictions of that order warrant disenchantment as the appropriate critical attitude in the face of increasingly pervasive ‘socially necessary semblance.’ Rather than describing a kind of affective or political pessimism, disenchantment should for the critical theorist prompt a disillusionment, an occasion to dispel notions of the political present which serve not human ends but only their own reproduction through mystification.

The concept of ‘disenchantment’ has its beginnings in the sociological work of Max Weber. According to Weber, the historical experience of modernity involves a disenchantment of reality, the dissolution of any overarching meaning—whether religious, metaphysical, spiritual, or historical—to human existence.¹ Weber equates this historical process of disenchantment with what he calls ‘rationalization,’ which, to cite Weber directly, “means that principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation.”² For Weber, then, disenchantment performs the work of unmasking phenomena that previously passed for magical or eternal mysteries. Yet Weber does not argue that this necessarily renders the world more transparent; rather, rationalization as disenchantment implies that “one *could* learn it at any time.”³ Weber’s claim, however, amounts to the position that, in light of this fateful and interminable process, human beings must resign themselves to the effort of specialized knowledge, which remains content with embracing the ephemerality of all knowledge, destined as it is to become outdated or surpassed by newer findings. Hence Weber can write the following: “A really definitive and good ac-

1 Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation,” *Daedalus*, 87.1 (1958), 111-134, 117.

2 *Ibid.*, 117.

3 *Ibid.*, 117.

complishment is today always a specialized accomplishment.”⁴ In this way, Weber uncritically accepts the reified separation between knowledge and *critical, immanent* reflection upon its own socio-historical context.⁵ “To take a political stand is one thing,” Weber writes, “and to analyze political structures and party positions is another.”⁶ The integrity of knowledge, for Weber, would find itself compromised if it made any kind of partisan concessions.

In contrast to Weber’s position, the position of Marx and Engels (and later the Frankfurt school) is to seriously challenge specialized *knowledge* as the antidote to the social ills accompanying life’s demythologization.⁷ That is, rather than insist on matching the technical and instrumental character of the ‘disenchantment of the world,’ Marx, Engels, and their inheritors focus instead on the illusions produced in the very act of the old myths being torn asunder. Further, those working in the Marxist tradition pose a serious challenge to the notion of a non-partisan knowing, albeit without suspending the possibility of adjudicating between views. In the Marxist tradition, the concept of ideology has captured this re-mythologization of the supposedly secularized and disenchant-ed world. It is to this tradition that we turn to recuperate a critical use of disenchantment, one which aims its critique not at some unmediated nature but instead at the form of life which both pre-

4 Ibid., 112.

5 For an incisive critique of the antinomies that characterize Weber’s theorization of industrial capitalism and rationality, see Herbert Marcuse, “Industrialism and Capitalism in the Work of Max Weber,” *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*, trans. Jeremy J. Schapiro, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 201-226.

6 Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation,” 117.

7 Cf. Jason Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017). Josephson-Storm’s claim is intended to challenge the misleading narrative of a ‘disenchanted’ European modernity. That is, he shares with Adorno and Horkheimer the suspicion that demythologization reverts to myth. However, his approach is perhaps too generous an account of the productive role of occultism (in our view) and, further, imputes a ‘binary’ framework to Adorno and Horkheimer’s discussion of myth and enlightenment, one we try to suggest here is not strictly binary at all (8-11). Josephson-Storm may be reiterating Adorno and Horkheimer’s view, after all, though he takes himself to be countering it.

supposes and seeks dominion over it.

I. Marx and Engels on the Fundamental Sociality of Ideology

The fraught history of ideology critique in Marxist theory provides us with several conflicting perspectives from which we might approach this question. Perhaps the most significant point of contention in the theorization of ideology critique has been whether it is ‘neutral’ or ‘critical’—or whether, indeed, it should be abandoned altogether as a relic of an untenable philosophical modernism that continues to harbor a naïve attachment to the distinction between essence and appearance. We hope to show three things: 1.) That the abandonment of ideology critique provides us with little more than spurious reasoning, often relying on gross simplifications, if not outright distortions; 2.) That the understanding of ideology critique as a ‘neutral’ theoretical practice misses the point inasmuch as it overlooks the historically specific character and genesis of ideologies in capitalist society and, further, seeks to abstractly circumvent the entanglement of subject and object; and 3.) That an understanding of ideology guided by a concern for social transformation cannot but be critical to the extent that it seeks to disclose the concrete and contradictory socio-historical determinations of ideology itself.

Before we enter this theoretical terrain, however, we shall begin by turning to Marx and Engels’ understanding of ideology in *The German Ideology*, since it is precisely there that the problem of ideology receives its most extensive treatment. Indeed, following Jan Rehmann and Jorge Larrain, we claim that, even in this earlier work, Marx and Engels account for ideology *critically* by establishing the mediations between ideology and the contradictory dynamics of capitalist society, particularly in terms of the division of labor, which *presupposes* a form of life characterized by alienated and reified social relations.

As is well known, *The German Ideology* takes the form of a

polemic against the Young Hegelians. Yet Marx and Engels take their critique of these “ideologists” as a point of departure to make more general points about the socio-historical determinations of ideology. This is exemplary of Marx and Engels’ commitment to a simultaneously objective *and* partisan critique. Along the way, they also furnish several methodological insights as to how to approach ideology. Hence Marx and Engels claim the following:

The premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real premises from which abstraction can only be made in the imagination. They are the real individuals, their activity and the material conditions under which they live, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity.⁸

Marx and Engels here emphasize the fundamental *sociality* of human life. Human beings, they claim, must be understood as situated within historically specific material conditions, those they inherit from the past and those they themselves produce through their ‘activity.’ And this emphasis on activity—which is always already *social activity*—constitutes the kernel of Marx and Engels’ conception of ideology which, rather than grounding ideology in the spontaneities of an autonomous, free-floating consciousness or in a mechanistic materialism, grounds it instead in the material relations between human beings, as well as the *active* ways in and through which they relate to the forms of social objectivity they appropriate from history and thereby transform.

And this last point proves inseparable from Marx and Engels’ thesis that “[C]onsciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of [human beings] is their actual life-process.”⁹ In other words, consciousness cannot be separated from the life-process of society and the corresponding forms of social intercourse that comprise it. Consequently, when Marx and Engels make the startling pronouncement that ideology has

8 Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, (New York: International Publishers, 1960), 7.

9 Ibid., 14.

no history, that ideology loses “the semblance of independence,” they mean no more than that ideology has no history *independent* of the forms of material intercourse between human beings.¹⁰ Contrary, then, to Louis Althusser’s claim that *The German Ideology* “contains a positivistic-mechanistic conception of ideology,” (and we shall return to the Althusserian position later) Marx and Engels endeavor to explain the material conditions of possibility of ideology, that is, to explain ideology as a *symptom* of alienated social relations.¹¹

To be sure, as Jan Rehmann argues, *The German Ideology* does not critique of the philosophy of consciousness on the basis of a false antithesis between life and consciousness, matter and mind, “but rather because it severed consciousness from the practical context of life in order to demonstrate its nature as a primary force.”¹² Marx and Engels had thus already accomplished the so-called ‘de-centering of the subject’ long before post-structuralism’s belated celebration of its dissolution in the play of language, discourse, or *jouissance*. What gives Marx and Engels’ account of ideology its critical force, however, is precisely their insistence on ideology as an irreducibly *practical, social problem*.

In this sense, Marx and Engels’ conception of ideology in *The German Ideology* cannot be reduced to mere mystification or ‘false consciousness,’ i.e., a false representation of the existing world. Neither, however, can it be grasped as an empirical description or taxonomy of prevailing beliefs, which itself becomes ideological by virtue of its separation of subject and object, consciousness and social being—that is, insofar as it assumes itself to be above the object it purports to describe and critique. It fails to account for its own entanglement with the very material context that generates ideologies and thus fails to be immanent. And here we reach our central claim pertaining to Marx and Engels: namely,

10 Ibid., 15.

11 Louis Althusser, “On Ideology,” *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian. (New York: Verso Books, 2014), 171-207, 173.

12 Jan Rehmann, *Theories of Ideology: The Powers of Alienation and Subjection*, (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2013), 25.

that, for them, an analysis of ideology proves necessarily *critical* precisely because of its *practical* orientation. György Márkus thus rightly points out that ideology critique

Demonstrates how the constitution of the culturally intended and socially effective meaning is co-determined by meaningless, or at least (in their meaning) uncomprehended condition of its constitution—with the aim...of also raising these mere factual and ‘external’ determinations to consciousness and thereby making them reflexively, and ultimately practically transcendable.¹³

In this sense, the critique of ideology aims to bring to consciousness the *seemingly* external, but in fact immanent, socio-historical determinations of its own constitution—and *this in order to practically transcend not merely the ideological distortions themselves, but also the very material conditions that generate them.*

Only in light of the previous considerations can we make sense of Marx and Engels’ now infamous assertion that

If in all ideology human beings and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a *camera obscura*, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process.¹⁴

The analogy between the retina and its inversion of objects and the topsy-turvy, inverted manner in which ideologies appear to determine the material conditions of life sheds light on the *necessity* of the inversions themselves. Of course, this does not mean that the physical necessity of the retina’s inversion of an object should be seen as synonymous with the *historical* forms of necessity engendered by capitalist society, ideological mystifications included. To be sure, as Karen Ng argues, “the very uncoupling of self-consciousness from life, the belief in an upside-down or inverted version of that relationship, the belief in the absolute transcendence of consciousness, is itself a product of material circumstances and

13 György Márkus, “On Ideology-Critique—Critically,” *Thesis Eleven*, 43 (1995): 66-99, 69.

14 Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 14.

relations that obtain in a particular form of life.”¹⁵ It bears repeating here that ideology has no history precisely because it cannot be separated from the practical life-process of society. We would like, however, to venture another claim: ideology has no history precisely because it amounts to an *eternalization* of the present, a false resolution of the contradictions that point beyond capitalist society itself. In other words, because ideology remains in the grip of the present, giving ideal expression to existing material relations, it contributes concretely to their perpetuation.

Take, for example, wage labor. Wages in capitalist society, presumably, provide the grounds for a fair exchange between worker and capitalist. As Marx reminds us in *Critique of the Gotha Program*, however, the wage-form is not the price of *labor in general*, but of *labor power*, the capacity to labor commodified by capital, which the worker *must* sell if they wish to survive. The worker has the ability to work only on the condition that they work beyond the amount of time necessary to ensure their own subsistence and thus only insofar as they work “for a certain time gratis for the capitalist.”¹⁶ As a form of appearance, then, the wage-form conceals the social relations of domination and exploitation that lie at its core. Ideals of autonomy, freedom, and individual choice provide the ideological justification for the wage-form, since it can be entered into ‘freely,’ even if the material conditions under which it becomes possible presuppose the separation of workers *from* the means of production and their concentration in the hands of the capitalist. The ‘freedom’ to become a wage-worker remains a matter of compulsion, unfreedom, the necessity of survival.

Here we must bring the division of labor, especially in terms of the division between manual and mental labor, which grows more and more acute in the development of capitalist society, into focus. Marx and Engels make clear that the ideological inversion

15 Karen Ng, “Ideology Critique from Hegel to Marx,” *Constellations*, 22.3 (2015): 393-404, 399.

16 Karl Marx, “Critique of the Gotha Program,” *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Robert C. Tucker. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 525-541, 535.

of the life-process of society derives ultimately from this division between manual and mental labor: “From this moment onwards consciousness *can* really flatter itself that it is something other than existing practice, that it is *really* conceiving something without conceiving something real.”¹⁷ The autonomization of ideas of freedom, consciousness, legal and juridical norms (to name but a few) do not, however, merely *mask* social relations marked by unfreedom; they directly contribute to the reproduction of such relations.

Furthermore, as we suggested earlier, the existence of ideology in capitalist society presupposes not only the division of mental and manual labor, it also presupposes the alienation of human beings under the rule of capital, a false form of social interdependency in which a necessary contradiction between individual and communal interest emerges.¹⁸ Equally important, though, is “the fact that intellectual and material activity—enjoyment and labour, production and consumption—devolve on different individuals, and that the only possibility of their not coming into contradiction lies in the negation in its turn of the division of labour.”¹⁹ Hence, ideological forms of consciousness derive from alienated social relations wherein human beings find themselves reduced to “an exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon them and from which they cannot escape.”²⁰ ‘Freedom’ under such conditions necessarily remains but an abstraction, a formalism, since the form of social interdependency or mediation characteristic of capitalist society necessitates a split between consciousness and the everyday life of individuals and the practical life-activity of society as a whole; between the self-understanding and practices of abstract, ‘accidental’ individuals and the conditions of commodity-production which reproduce themselves behind their backs, as it

17 Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 22.

18 For one of the most rigorous treatments of Marx’s critique of capital as a quasi-objective form of social mediation grounded in abstract labor, see Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx’s Critical Theory*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 123-185.

19 Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 21.

20 *Ibid.*, 22. Translation modified from the English edition.

were.²¹

In a word, the division of mental and manual labor in capitalist society simultaneously generates alienated social relations and ideological forms of consciousness. The existence of each presupposes the existence of all the others; *the relation therefore proves dialectical, not at all causal or ‘mechanistic.’* For this division between mental and manual labor in its capitalist form (which presupposes capitalist conditions of production, i.e., the dispossession and separation of workers from the means of production) generates the conditions under which it becomes possible at all to enshrine the products of consciousness as independent from the realm of social practice. The ideology of ‘freedom,’ as we show above with respect to wage labor, thus serves to mystify its own material conditions of possibility, the ways in which the ideal itself finds itself *necessarily* thwarted by the material practices of social life. In order to engage in a critique of such ideological forms, therefore, it will not suffice to empirically disprove ideologies on the level of their content (although, of course, ideology critique cannot dispense with this altogether), for they require an interpretation as *effective effects, symptoms of a contradictory form social life that requires them for its effective functioning.*

To keep with our example, ideologies of personal choice and unencumbered individualism in capitalist society give the lie to a form of social life in which ‘freedom’ itself remains fundamentally entwined with domination, alienation, suffering, and exploitation. No reworking of such ideals, however, will resolve that contradiction. For Marx and Engels’ insistence on ideology as an irreducibly social problem, symptomatic of the alienated separa-

21 Cf. Étienne Balibar, “Ideology or Fetishism: Power or Subjection,” *The Philosophy of Marx*, trans. Chris Turner. (New York: Verso, 2017), 45. Balibar holds that the Marxian approach to ideology seeks not to elaborate a general theory of the formation of ideas and discourses supplemented by an account of domination, for “that question is always already included in the elaboration of the concept.” Following Balibar’s thesis here, we might say the bourgeois ideal of ‘freedom’ outlined above in fact proves inseparable from its material entanglement in practices of domination. The critique of bourgeois ‘freedom’ as ideology, then, does not begin with a reified separation between ideal and material reality.

ration between social practice and consciousness and ultimately between human beings, suggests that a new theory of knowledge proves not only inadequate, but itself ideological, since the very presumption that consciousness should be adequate to the object obscures that, under present conditions, such ideologies remain a necessary feature of society. Ideological forms of consciousness, then, call to be practically overcome. Ideology critique remains a crucial dimension of such a project, for it aims at nothing less than the establishment of a form of reflexivity between praxis and the social objectivity to which the former remains falsely, but objectively, beholden.

II. Iterations of Ideology Critique: The Neutral and Critical Conceptions and Their Rejection

The treatment of ideology in the work of Louis Althusser presents the account given above with some difficulties. To be sure, as we mentioned earlier, Althusser interprets *The German Ideology* as abiding by a mechanistic and positivistic view of ideology (with subtle formulations here and there), leaving us deprived of a theory of ideology “in general.”²² He interprets Marx and Engels’ claim there that “ideology has no history” as indicative of a positivism that reduces the ideological to false consciousness, outright illusion, a residual and thus ineffective “nothingness,” while providing his own re-appropriation of the phrase: Ideology has no history—it is “omni-historical”—because it belongs to the very structure of history as a whole, which Althusser understands in terms of class struggle.²³ But as we explained in the previous section, Marx and Engels’ contention that ideology has no history means to connect ideological processes to the material life-process of society and the historically specific social relations that compose it. Note, however, this does not *simply* mean that ideas, norms, and concepts relate in some way or another to their socio-historical context—the position of a historicist taxonomy of ideas—but also that the very

22 Althusser, “On Ideology,” 173.

23 Ibid., 174.

position which sees them as determinative in social life, because of their ‘transcendental’ status, represents ideology par excellence. For the autonomization of ideas stands as an accurate reflection an alienated form of sociality; it remains content to eternalize this condition by leaving the material realm to its own necessities, while insulating consciousness from the latter. Or, put in another way, ideological consciousness fails to grasp the historical and practical determinations of the object and consequently distorts its own dependency on the object itself.

In light of these considerations, how should we understand Althusser’s notion of ideology as a phenomenon as “eternal” as the class struggle it presupposes?²⁴ We might very well make the following concession: The category of ideology applies to *all* societies precisely because it applies to *none in particular*.²⁵ At the same time, this should not lead us to conclude that the determinate form

24 Ibid., 176.

25 Cf. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus. (London: Penguin Books, 1973), 85. Marx’s reflections on the validity of a “rational abstraction” remain suggestive for a critical theory of capitalist society today. For even as Marx maintains that rational abstractions, such as “production in general,” allow us to perceive across history a “common element,” the latter nevertheless “is itself segmented many times over and splits into different determinations.” In fact, this pertains to the problem of identity and non-identity in history, since it suggests that *all* modes of production share a fundamental material premise: namely, the *transhistorical* metabolic relation between the subject, humanity, and the object, nature. Marx shrewdly observes, however, that we should not ignore the historically specific dimensions of the determinations which transform this transhistorical metabolic relation in order that “their essential difference is not forgotten,” as in the theories of bourgeois political economists. Put in yet another way, the bourgeois economists hypostatize certain economic categories and laws historically specific to capitalist society and render them transhistorical, *ideologically projecting them onto the past and eternalizing them into the future*. Marx’s dialectical formulation, on the other hand, insists that we can maintain both rational abstractions and their historically specific segmentation into different determinations; the antithesis between them is a false one. The same might be said of “ideology in general”: ideology amounts to a distortion, and in fact we can point to instances of ideology that precede capitalist society, but the social relations that give rise to such distortion vary historically and affect both their form and their function, not least of all in capitalist society.

ideology takes can be separated from content of the social relations that comprise a particular form of social life. Indeed, this very presumption underlies Althusser's claims regarding the eternal character of ideology. For Althusser, a theory of ideology must disclose the function of ideology in general as subjectivation—"the fact that you and I are *always already* subjects and, as such, constantly practice the rituals of ideological recognition, which guarantee for us that we are indeed concrete, individual, unmistakable, and, naturally, irreplaceable subjects."²⁶ Althusser thereby highlights the obviousness of being a subject—a kind of "it-goes-without-saying"—as the primal form of ideology. In this account, ideology acquires the status of an *immutable existential fact* of human life; it will persist even in a society in which classes have been abolished. Althusser thus hypostatizes ideology, for how could ideology, as an omni-historical dimension of class societies, continue to exist in a society in which the abolition of classes as such became a reality? This is not to say a post-capitalist society will have *immediately and entirely* rid itself of ideologies, for that must be the conscious and transitional work of human beings who understand the material conditions that engender such distortions to be incompatible with genuinely human ends. Here we merely wish to point out that, even on its own terms, Althusser's theory lapses into a performative contradiction.

The Althusserian conception of ideology has had a far-reaching impact, appearing as *the* conception associated with the term 'ideology' in figures ranging from Judith Butler to Slavoj Žižek to Jacques Derrida and influencing a generation of French philosophers including Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze. In feminist philosophy, the term ideology appears almost exclusively with reference to Althusser's conception.²⁷ This wide range of in-

26 Althusser, "On Ideology," 189.

27 See for example, Alison Assiter, *Althusser and Feminism*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 1990). See also, Rosemary Hennessy, "Women's Lives / Feminist Knowledge: Feminist Standpoint as Ideology Critique," *Hypatia*, 8.1 (1993): 14-34. Cf. Michele Barrett, *Women's Oppression Today: The Marxist/Feminist Encounter*, (New York: Verso Books, 2014), esp., 28-41.

fluence includes the tradition of critical theory but also the shaping of ‘post-Marxism.’ Indeed, one of the central categories that post-Marxism seeks to reject or, in some cases, refashion beyond recognition, is that of ideology. Ernesto Laclau, for example, vacillates between outright repudiating the concept of ideology and reformulating the concept to apply to the category of social totality itself (as ideological in a pejorative sense) which is traditionally thought to play a constitutive role in ideology critique.²⁸ Where Laclau is convinced of the problematic and, indeed, disposable character of ideology, his rejection stems from what he perceives as the “essentialist conception of both society and social agency” required by the concept.²⁹ A closer look at Laclau’s account, however, reveals that his uneasiness about the concept emerges from the faults of the neutral conception as Althusser poses it.³⁰ The alleged ‘essentialism’ of the theory of ideology stems from the rather narrow gap left by Althusser in the relation between immediate class interest and the subjectivization of the working class. That is, Laclau—we argue—is both responding to a weak account of ideology as well as offering a poor response to the problems it presents. When Laclau attempts to reformulate the notion of ideology against these ‘essentialist’ features he notes that “what is impossible is a critique of ideology as such; all critiques will necessarily be intra-

28 Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, (New York: Verso Books, 1990), 90-92. Ernesto Laclau, “The Death and Resurrection of the Theory of Ideology,” *Modern Language Notes (MLN)*, 112.3 (1997): 297-321, 299.

29 Ibid., 89. Cf. Larrain, *Marxism and Ideology*, 95. In reference to Laclau’s earlier work—*Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism*—Larrain categorizes Laclau among those who “emphasize ideology as an objective level of society and...tend to criticize the ‘misrecognition aspect’ as a necessary component part of ideology.” This categorization comes on the heels of clarifying that “Althusser himself oscillates between a negative and positive conception” of ideology. This is worth noting since, although Laclau functionally abandons his position in this earlier work, the basic ambiguities he inherits remain part of his engagement with the notion of ideology.

30 This shared misreading of Marx and Engels’ conception of ideology notwithstanding, Laclau (unlike Althusser) goes to great lengths to reject the category of social totality in *New Reflections*, 89.

ideological.”³¹ That is, where Laclau seems to locate the problem is, first and foremost, in the strict association of false consciousness with class interest (an Althusserian premise). His response to this formulation (i.e., the ‘neutral’ conception we critique above) is to insist on the *intra*-ideological character of any critique of ideology, functionally reaffirming the neutral conception to which he is responding.³² Although Laclau is critical of Althusser’s formulation of ideology as ‘eternal’ and though he does seem to detect a similar weakness in formulating ideology as merely a reflection of class interest, he seems only to repeat the more fundamental error of Althusser’s conception. Put another way, Laclau reproduces the theoretical ambivalence in Althusser’s account of ideology and thus seems to reject or redefine the category in response to this ambivalence, one which we do not find in Marx and Engels.

Others, however, take another route; they see the historical conditions which necessitated ideology critique as having been overcome altogether. Jürgen Habermas, for instance, goes so far as to entertain Daniel Bell’s “end of ideology” thesis.³³ The problem, symptomatically, stems from Habermas’ reductive reading of ideology critique in the Marxist tradition—in Marx and György Lukács particularly—as reducible to “class consciousness,” that is, to class interests.³⁴ For Marx and Lukács, according to Habermas,

31 Laclau, “Death and Resurrection,” 299.

32 For a critique of Laclau and Mouffe’s presumption of the autonomy of concepts (and, by proxy, the critique of the so-called ‘essentialism’ of ideology), see Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Retreat from Class: A New ‘True’ Socialism*, (New York: Verso Books, 1986), 138-139, 151-153.

33 Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 2. trans. Thomas McCarthy, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), 353. It should be noted, however, that in his earlier work Habermas did in fact mobilize the concept of ideology. See especially *Toward a Rational Society: Student Protest, Science, and Politics*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro, (Boston: Beacon Press 1970), 81-122. For a more sustained critical evaluation of the development of ideology critique in Habermas’ corpus, see Rehmann, *Theories of Ideology*, 99-111.

34 See György Lukács, “Class Consciousness,” and “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat” in *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1972), 46-222.

the working class' consciousness of their own material interests functions "in an ideology-critical fashion, against the dominant form of consciousness and reclaims for the other side certain privileged opportunities for critical insight."³⁵ The question, for Habermas, becomes whether we can still seek recourse to this Archimedean point of reference for ideology critique in light of the historic compromise between labor and capital constitutive of welfare-state capitalism. Habermas answers in the negative:

In the face of a class antagonism pacified by means of welfare-state measures, however, and in the face of the growing anonymity of class structures, the theory of class consciousness loses its empirical reference. It no longer has application to a society in which we are increasingly unable to identify strictly class-specific lifeworlds.³⁶

We do not wish to address here the so-called "pacification" of class antagonism, a central point of reference for the nominalism of neoliberal ideology, which wholeheartedly embraces the diversification and complexification of social life so as to discount the possibility of any systematic analysis of the ravages of global financialized capital. Rather, we wish to emphasize the limitations of an understanding of ideology critique as *exclusively* predicated on empirical class interests rather than on contradictory social relations—for example, the social relations constitutive of the division between manual and physical labor and the material presuppositions of this division, namely the separation of workers from the democratic reorganization of the means and relations of production.³⁷ The weakness of Habermas' position lies in the problematic denial of the objective contradictions between labor and capital, a move made possible by rendering such contradictions entirely dependent on class consciousness, which he understands as the ways in which the working class actually understands itself at a particular moment. If no such "class consciousness" exists, so the

35 Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 2., 352.

36 *Ibid.*, 352.

37 For a similar critique, see Rehmann, *Theories of Ideology*, 99-111.

story goes, ideology critique is deprived of its very conditions of possibility.

For Habermas the project of ideology critique has been all but superseded. Not only for the reasons elaborated above, however. For in adopting the Weberian thesis that the disenchantment of the world—the rationalization of life as a whole—entails a process whereby the “rationality differential” separating the realm of the sacred from the profane, the ideological from the practices of everyday life and consciousness, begins to wane, Habermas also embraces the idea that the lifeworld “more and more loses its structural possibilities for ideology formation.”³⁸ Insofar as ideologies must possess a totalizing character, the rationalized and differentiated spheres of argumentation and knowledge cannot, Habermas believes, affect modernity’s understanding ideologically.³⁹ On the one hand, this view undialectically reduces ideology to the status of a *Weltanschauung*, sundering the dialectical nexus between ideas and social practice.⁴⁰ On the other, it overlooks the fact that this very differentiation of knowledge, expressed in the historically specific fragmentation Habermas diagnoses as constitutive of late capitalist modernity, can itself serve ideological purposes. To cite Karl Korsch’s succinct definition of ideology: “Ideology is only a false consciousness, in particular one that mistakenly attributes an autonomous character to a partial phenomena [*sic*] of social life.”⁴¹ The reification of the lifeworld indexed by Habermas, the fragmentation of everyday life and consciousness, enables the ideological and abstract conclusion that human life can be explained as a whole, for example, on biological, psychological, or even philosophical grounds.

Unlike the aforementioned accounts, Rehmann’s analysis of the Marxian notion of ideology insists, as we have throughout, on its critical force. To be sure, the criticism that the Marxian view

38 Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 2., 353-354.

39 Ibid., 354.

40 Rehmann, *Theories of Ideology*, 109.

41 Karl Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2008), 83.

of ideology partakes of a “class essentialism” becomes spurious in light of the fact that, even in his most seemingly rigid formulations regarding the base-superstructure model, Marx does not reduce ideology to the interests of a particular class—Althusser’s position, ultimately—but to the terms or forms through which human beings become conscious of the contradiction between the productive forces and the relations of production.⁴² To complicate matters further, Rehmann suggests that the ‘neutral’ interpretation of ideology misses the mark insofar as it obscures how Marx and Engels, in *The German Ideology* especially, grasp ideology as a “transitory necessity for class-societies.”⁴³ But we should not take this to mean that ideology critique ought to be guided by some ultimate ideal to which society must conform—since the project of social transformation is a question of praxis—but by the emancipatory commitment that human beings should, at the very least, clarify to themselves the conditions under which they think and act and reproduce their specific form of life. This very commitment sustains Marx’s second thesis from the *Theses on Feuerbach*, written shortly before *The German Ideology*, in which he claims that human beings “must prove the truth,” the “this-sidedness” of their thinking in practice.⁴⁴ Marx’s point, surely, is not that critical theory ought to be abandoned, but that theory for its own sake becomes uncritical, and thus ideological, by virtue of its lack of historical self-reflexivity. That is, it elides “the fact that the secular basis detaches itself in the clouds as an independent realm can only be explained by the cleavage and self-contradictions within this secular basis.”⁴⁵

Reminiscent of Rehmann’s construal of the neutral-critical distinction among the conceptions of ideology, Jorge Larrain (using the terms “negative” and “positive”) likewise traces the historical developments within the Marxist tradition which produce a non-critical conception.⁴⁶ Larrain, however, places distinct empha-

42 Rehmann, *Theories of Ideology*, 56.

43 Ibid., 57.

44 Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach. The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed. Ed. Robert C. Tucker, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 144.

45 Ibid., 144.

46 Jorge Larrain, *Marxism and Ideology*, (London: The Macmillan Press

sis on the reduction of ideology—whether it is conceived critically or neutrally—to false consciousness or strictly to class interest, following the reading of Marx and Engels we foreground above.⁴⁷ Instead, he offers the following formulation of the relation between class interest and a critical conception of ideology:

The character of ideology is given by its relation to the interests of the ruling classes and not by a genetic relation to the class from which it originates. That is to say, ideology necessarily serves the interests of the ruling class even if it has not been produced by that class.⁴⁸

Larrain, in other words, does not reject the basis of ideology in class interest *tout court* but, rather, means to insist that a critical conception of ideology should capture a broader scope of obfuscatory mechanisms. Further, his account insists on the flexibility of a category or concept's status as ideology. For “non-ideological ideas,” he writes, “may become ideological and vice versa.”⁴⁹ That Ltd., 1983), 4. Interestingly, Larrain's account of the development of a “positive” (i.e., “neutral” in Rehmman's terms) emphasizes the availability of *The German Ideology* to the first generation of Marxist theoreticians after Marx's death. “It is no exaggeration,” he writes, “to maintain that the absence of this text until 1926 had an important bearing upon the evolution of the theory of ideology” (54). “This is not decisive for the most general concepts of historical materialism,” however, since these concepts would be repeated, elaborated, and modified at length elsewhere in Marx and Engels' corpus (54). In Larrain's view, “it was certainly more important in the case of ideology, for there was to be no further or extensive treatment of the subject again, at least not by Marx” (54).

47 See also Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983), 34: “There are no more ideologies in the authentic sense of false consciousness, only advertisements for the world through duplication and the provocative lie which does not seek belief but commands silence.” Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford, (New York: Columbia Press, 1998), 115: Adorno details the concept of ideology (against the ‘sociology of knowledge’) as “socially necessary false consciousness,” in response to Pareto and Mannheim. This would indicate that Adorno's position on the status of ‘false consciousness’ is best indexed to the position of his interlocutor, i.e., his gesture of deemphasizing that category should not be read as a rejection *tout court*.

48 Larrain, *Marxism and Ideology*, 25.

49 Ibid., 42.

is, ideological premises do not have a fixed status as such but are critically indexed to their concrete social and historical circumstances. It is for this reason, for example, that we can trace *both ideological and non-ideological uses of the category of disenchantment*. This ambivalence with regard to the status of a concept as ideological is akin to the complexities captured by Adorno and Horkheimer in their classic work, complexities which have invited less than dialectical readings of the relationship between enlightenment and myth as well as between reason and rationality. Indeed, in a broader sense, as Fredric Jameson has pointed out, this attempt to navigate conceptual ambivalence has led to misreadings of Adorno as a “post-Marxist” or “postmodernist,” a point which we will briefly return to later.⁵⁰

Larrain’s intervention into the history of the notion of ideology has further implications for the concept’s critical potential, one that points to the advantages of the more robustly explanatory conception we find in the Frankfurt School (i.e., ‘socially necessary semblance’). “It is necessary to emphasize,” in Larrain’s view, “that [*The German Ideology*] does not say that the ruling ideology is the ideology of the ruling class, for this is perhaps one of the most frequent misconceptions one finds in the literature.”⁵¹ This common misconception stems from a conflation characteristic of the ‘neutral’ conception: “Here Marx and Engels speak of ideas in general not of ideology.”⁵² Larrain’s clarification suggests that, although

50 Fredric Jameson, *Late Marxism: Adorno, or the Persistence of the Dialectic*, (New York: Verso Books, 2007), 15. Cf. J.M. Bernstein. *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 10. Alternatively, Bernstein offers an ethics-oriented reading of Adorno’s work. We have not spent any considerable time engaging this work only because it is not possessed of the problems we aim to diagnose in the literature on Adorno (though it may suffer from others). However, we would like to note that Bernstein’s reading does not reject the category of disenchantment, but neither does it relate the critique of ideology to that category or, indeed, address ideology critique at any length. Furthermore, Bernstein uses terms like ‘ideology,’ ‘false consciousness’ in a somewhat idiosyncratic fashion, leaving those terms largely undefined (See for example, pp. 139, 410).

51 Larrain, *Marxism and Ideology*, 24.

52 *Ibid.*, 24.

the ruling ideas may coincide with the interest of the ruling class, that is not their exclusive function. What this intervention makes room for is an account of ideology which can grasp the larger dynamics of systemic reproduction and mystification which cannot be traced in a clear-cut fashion to this or that ruling or ruled class and its historically and socially specific circumstances. Put another way, Larrain’s manner of clarifying Marx and Engels’ conception of ideology and its subsequent variations in the Marxist tradition helps to highlight the need for a more broad-spectrum, though no less logically precise, formulation of the critical conception of ideology. Toward this end, we can turn to the work of Theodor Adorno (and Max Horkheimer) and his account of “socially necessary semblance.” But before detailing the distinctive elements of this conception of ideology, it is worth returning to our theme—disenchantment—to consider its status *as ideology*.

III. Adorno: Disenchantment and the Critique of Ideology

Even in its earlier formulations in Weber, the notion of “disenchantment” is possessed of a certain *ambivalence*. The term often marks a rupture of ‘traditional’ values and dispositions toward epistemology, metaphysics, and ontology which proffers both liberatory and potentially destructive qualities. Indeed, the ambivalence of disenchantment is what Adorno and Horkheimer inherit from Weber in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, a text whose reception has been the subject of so much debate both within and without the tradition of critical theory. In her essay, “Adorno and the Disenchantment of Nature,” Alison Stone describes the multiple senses of the term ‘disenchantment’ as Adorno and Horkheimer use it. She describes three distinct but interrelated meanings:

- (1) that we have ceased to see nature as an inherently meaningful order, (2) that we have come to assume that nature is devoid of mystery, wholly accessible to our understanding; and (3) that we no longer find nature ‘sacred’, peopled by divine or demonic beings and worthy of reverence or dread...Adorno and Hork-

heimer believe, modern society both rests on an outlook that disenchant's nature and encourages a particular kind of experience of nature as enchanted.⁵³

Stone's definition of disenchantment (understandably, since her study is focused on *Dialectic of Enlightenment* primarily) emphasizes the term in relation to nature, an emphasis which is, further, inherited from Weber. Although this is an appropriate use, as we understand it, the term can function somewhat more broadly to refer to a disenchantment with society, in addition to nature which is mediated by its social relations. That is, in our view, the term can accurately capture a distinctive relation between human beings and nature *and* it can also capture our relation to 'second nature' (i.e., society). Further, we argue that it is desirable to see society "devoid of mystery" where mystification obscures its real contradictions, to undertake a 'ruthless criticism' which does not hold society "sacred," and to cease to see the present society as "an inherently meaningful order," if by 'meaningful' one means rational or self-identical. In other words, where the ramifications of the disenchantment of nature (via instrumental reason) are unavoidably accompanied by pernicious side effects, a *disenchantment of the present society* would work toward undermining such effects.⁵⁴

53 Alison Stone, "Adorno and the Disenchantment of Nature," *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 32.3 (2006): 231-251, 232.

54 Cf. Stone, "Adorno and the Disenchantment of Nature," 233, 239. Stone's primary claim is that Adorno's later writings (i.e., *Negative Dialectics* and *Aesthetic Theory*) suggest "that we can also experience nature as enchanted in an alternative way which does *not* tie into, but criticizes, humanity's domination of nature" (233). That is, her own intervention is to insist on the ambiguous but potential advantages of a specific form of *enchantment*. For Stone, the later Adorno holds that a re-enchantment of nature *is* necessary to end its domination" (233). We have taken the opposite position in that *disenchantment* is the category that can be rehabilitated in service of critiquing "humanity's domination of nature." Stone's 're-enchantment' reading of Adorno's later works entails an important qualification: For Adorno, the only kind of re- enchantment which can avert this risk is one that finds natural beings to be mysteriously meaningful solely because they refer to their histories of immeasurable suffering" (248-249). That is, 'enchantment' has its source not in theological or spiritual precepts but the magnitude of specific forms and instances of suffering.

Although we would not, following Adorno, defend the claim that nature is “wholly accessible to our understanding,” insofar as objects are never reducible to our consciousness of them (though they are made to appear so), we would suggest that the knowledge of society as *a rationally discernible totality* is a requirement for our disenchantment with it. By this we simply mean that society, because of capitalism’s historically specific impulse toward totalization, should be understood as a self-reproducing and cohesive (if not always coherent) system.

In contrast, more contemporary uses of the term disenchantment have lost the double sense intended in both Weber and Adorno and Horkheimer’s accounts and, indeed, have relinquished the notion of social totality. For well-known figures such as Richard Rorty, “the disenchantment of the world” refers to a disposition toward contemporary life which is, on his view, at least liberated from its metaphysical and rational tethers. Paradoxically, the phrase harkens to its earlier use by Weber which was intended to capture the presumption of total, rational intelligibility of the natural world accompanying increasing secularization and scientific advancement. Unlike Weber, who was somewhat anxious about the change, Rorty’s praise of “disenchantment” and his generally polemical attitude toward what he claims is ‘theological’ in its most basic logic is perhaps preemptively celebratory.⁵⁵ That is, while it is troubling to note a widespread rejection of the category of disenchantment, it is no less troubling to see its insufficiently critical affirmation.

Another important dimension of the term is also leveled in its contemporary (and disproportionately pejorative) use. Overwhelmingly, the objects of contemporary disenchantment are *concepts themselves*, rather than the world in which they are generated. One notable example is the shift toward ‘post-Marxism’ in much left political theory, a shift which has been characterized by some as a kind of “scepticism within Marxism itself.”⁵⁶ In short, the cri-

55 Cf. Dews, *Limits of Disenchantment: Essays on Contemporary European Philosophy*, (New York: Verso, 1995), 2.

56 Stuart Sim, *Post-Marxism: An Intellectual History*, (New York: Routledge,

tique launched by post-Marxism is, not far from Rorty's suspicions, aimed at the perceived theological or dogmatic (i.e., enchanting) elements of its causal and explanatory workings. In the case of both third wave pragmatism and post-Marxism, disenchantment *refers not to the world but to ways of conceiving of the world* (what Adorno might call, "a fetishistic view of the concept").⁵⁷ On the other hand, where it does make contact with the world, it does so in the distinctively self-critical frame of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR. Certainly, a concern for critical rigor and normative justification is necessary for the project of social critique with which the category of disenchantment has long been associated. However, the supposed conceptual caution in the present case may serve *to obscure rather than illuminate* the complex position of critique. Adorno's attention to the fetishization of the concept reflects our earlier observation in Marx and Engels' work, i.e., ideology emerges in the division of mental and manual labor, in the separation of ideas from the reproduction of life.

As an historical description of a world in flux—economically, technologically, spiritually, and theoretically—disenchantment referred simultaneously to concrete, material changes and our conceptual grasping of them. For Weber and for the Frankfurt School, disenchantment referred not simply to models or mental constructions about society but, in fact, its transmutation in concrete forms, with careful attention to the *mutual determination* of these spheres. Another important contrast with its use by Adorno and Horkheimer is that although disenchantment is desirable in its role in "the extirpation of animism," a similarly anti-theological disposition shared by more recent uses, this desirable effect is neither its only consequence nor a genuine achievement of scientific or positivist disenchantment. The possibility of "[overthrowing] fantasy with knowledge" (i.e., correcting myth with instrumental rationality) is itself what is problematized in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, though it is read (most famously by Jürgen Habermas and

2001), 1.

57 Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton, (London: Continuum, 2007), 11.

Axel Honneth) as a rejection of the possibility of overcoming myth, i.e., as anti-Enlightenment or anti-rationalist.⁵⁸ The question for Adorno and Horkheimer is not whether or not myth can be overcome, but whether it can be overcome through instrumental reason or, indeed, through reason exclusively or primarily.⁵⁹ The sardonic tone of the text, aimed at the entwinement of instrumental reason and the logic of capital accumulation, often confounds this subtlety for the less generous reader. Thus, we can see that the stakes of reading disenchantment as a critical concept and, further, as category which is not *merely* conceptual are rather high.

With these distinctions in mind, reading disenchantment as a critical concept invites a turn to the *critique of ideology*. If disenchantment is to be a critical concept, avoiding the pitfalls to which we gesture above, then it must take the shape of ideology critique. With reference to the uses of ‘disenchantment’ that we have tried to problematize here, the critique of ideology works against the concept’s own ideological use. Firstly, ideology is neither strictly conceptual nor epistemological and thus does not fail to reflect the critical dynamic between subject and object. That is, disenchantment as ideology critique does not prioritize the concept to the detriment of the social conditions which gave rise to it. Ideology emerges from material contradictions and concrete social practices, a fact which works against its excessively abstract and self-referential character in contemporary critical and political theory. Secondly, Adorno’s formulations of ideology offer us critical resources for critiquing social practices and our conceptions of them, for

58 Cf. Deborah Cook, “Adorno, Ideology, and Ideology Critique,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 27.1 (2001): 1-20. Cook not only insists that this is not an accurate reading of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* but supports that claim with a reading of *Negative Dialectics* (10). Although Cook is perhaps foremost among Adorno scholars in addressing the centrality of ideology critique in his work, she does not establish a connection between ideology and disenchantment, as we have tried to do here. See also, Bernstein, *Disenchantment and Ethics*, 4.

59 Cf. Alison Stone, “Adorno and the Disenchantment of Nature.” *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 32.3 (2006): 231-253. Stone offers a corrective reading of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* which clarifies what is meant by the term in that text. However, Stone’s reading (like that of Cook or Bernstein) does not relate the notion of ideology and its critique to the category of disenchantment.

assessing ideology in its truth and falsity, capturing the ambivalence suspended in more recent uses. Drawing on Adorno's notion of ideology as 'socially necessary semblance' or 'socially necessary false consciousness,' we hope to critically evaluate its present use and its dualistic and problematic character.

IV. Ideology Critique as Critical Disenchantment

A *critical disenchantment* of the kind that operates as ideology critique reveals that neither a straightforwardly triumphalist attitude (à la Rorty or Habermas) nor a complacent pessimism (the position most frequently attributed to Adorno and Horkheimer) necessarily results from disenchantment. Instead, a critical disenchantment would demonstrate the need for a dialectical approach to myth and enlightenment, subject and object, as well as concept and reality. "Necessity," Adorno writes, "compels philosophy to operate with concepts, but this necessity must not be turned into the virtue of their priority."⁶⁰ Rather than rejecting conceptuality *as such*, Adorno is careful to distinguish his own position as warranting a critical attitude toward the primacy of concepts while nonetheless making use of them. This is exemplified by his remark that philosophy "must strive, by way of concepts, to transcend the concept."⁶¹ We raise this point to emphasize that, rather than dispensing with the concept of "disenchantment," it is possible to make use of the concept critically—and with reference to its social and material conditions of possibility—to identify the means of its ideological cooptation and clarify what necessitates that cooptation. Further, following Adorno, we seek to treat the "disenchantment of the

60 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 11.

61 Ibid., 15. The logic of this formulation is echoed near the end of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as well: "Enlightenment itself, having mastered itself and assumed its own power, could break through the limits of enlightenment" (172). This passage, not unlike the one cited above, clearly works against the anti-rationalist or 'postmodern' readings of Adorno and Horkheimer as having abandoned the project of enlightenment (rather than critically interrogating it in the hopes of transforming not only the category but also the reality from which it emerges).

concept” as “the antidote of philosophy” as idealism.⁶²

In order to better grasp Adorno’s conception of ideology, we will consider some exemplary iterations of “socially necessary semblance.” The criteria used for selecting these passages (there are numerous others) simply aim to demonstrate the continuity with and the productive elaboration on the conception of ideology between Marx and his inheritors. That is, we argue that Adorno’s conception represents an important elaboration on Marx and Engels’ while also avoiding the pitfalls of, for example, Althusser’s conception. In “Cultural Criticism and Society,” Adorno claims that:

Today, ideology means society as appearance. Although mediated by the totality behind which stands the rule of partiality, ideology is not simply reducible to a partial interest. It is, as it were, equally near the centre in all its pieces.⁶³

Here we can see the first signs of the distinctiveness of Adorno’s approach. Although the social totality is mediated by “the rule of partiality” (i.e. the fulfillment of ruling class interests) it is not reducible to such partiality. Rather than restrict the scope of ideology to rigidly conceived class interest—the limitations of which we have tried to highlight in §2—Adorno attempts to broach the broader dynamics of society’s reproduction. In lieu of partiality, he claims, “If ideology is defined as a socially necessary appearance, then the ideology today is society itself insofar as its integral power and inevitability, its overwhelming existence-in-itself, surrogates the meaning which that existence has exterminated.”⁶⁴ In other words, *it is the whole of society as a self-perpetuating totality which is the scope of ideology*. Although class antagonism remains a central motor of ideological mystification, Adorno aims to address the ways

62 Ibid., 13.

63 Adorno, *Prisms*, 31.

64 Ibid., 31. The “inevitability” in this context is best understood as synonymous with unavoidable or inescapable. What Adorno is emphasizing here is not the persistence of ideology indefinitely into the future but, rather, the profound grip of its “integral power” in the present.

in which capitalist society reproduces itself in and through more indirect, and thus less directly observable, contradictory dynamics.

However, a subtle distinction is necessary to clarify Adorno's critique of society as a social totality whose reproduction requires the obfuscation of its constitutive contradictions. For Adorno, this critique emerges from the specific features of capitalist society itself. That is, the normative ground which requires this form of critique are the conditions of society themselves. "The attack on the whole," Adorno clarifies, "draws strength from the fact that the semblance of unity and wholeness in the world grows with the advance of reification; that is, with division."⁶⁵ For Adorno, the critique of ideology of the social totality stems from capitalism's own tendency toward totalization. It is for precisely this reason, in Adorno's view, that "calling culture as a whole into question from outside under the general notion of ideology" (i.e., the neutral notion of ideology) or "confronting it with the norms which it itself has crystallized—cannot be accepted by critical theory."⁶⁶ Although Adorno is careful to insist that the critique of ideology does take the form of an immanent critique, he is equally cautious so as not to suggest the critique of ideology is simply a matter of assimilating reality more fully to existing norms—making reality 'live up to its promises' of freedom and equality—i.e., internal criticism. Ideology critique cannot simply hold a mirror to society so that it only reflects its existing norms.

It is with these nuances that a critical disenchantment must be formulated. To begin with, it cannot be a disenchantment *merely* with concepts. What Marx and Engels and Adorno's accounts of ideology point to is that conceptual disenchantment is only as good as its capacity to induce our disenchantment with the world as it currently is. That is, the "disenchantment of the concept" which Adorno insists is the "antidote" to the antinomies of philosophy should turn the eye of the critic of ideology toward the social world which has necessitated semblances to sustain and reproduce itself. What has been forgotten or self-consciously foregone by

65 Ibid., 31.

66 Ibid., 31.

those more contemporary critics of disenchantment is that such a practice should lead us neither to dispense with the objective world as illusion (*à la* Rorty), nor to presume the immediate or seamlessly emancipatory function of demythologization (*à la* positivism) nor, again, to be disenchanted with certain concepts as if they have, on their own, shaped what we abhor about our present, as many who launch accusations of pessimism do.

In recent years, there has been a kind of renaissance of ideology critique. Critical theorists have returned to the concept of ideology seeking to revitalize, clarify, and elaborate on Marx and Engels' formulations as well as those of the early Frankfurt school, in spite of longstanding and widespread suspicion about its most basic premises. This recent upsurge of scholarship is rooted in a critical (i.e., negative) conception of ideology and thus circumvents many of the limitations we have highlighted in §2. In the contribution of Karen Ng, rejuvenating ideology critique entails a genealogy of the concept in Hegel and Marx as well as of the "critical naturalism" found therein.⁶⁷ Ng's approach to the normative ground of ideology critique is similar to our own in that it foregrounds, following Marx and Engels, the "reproduction of life" in the process of conceptualization.⁶⁸ Rahel Jaeggi's intervention, similarly, shares a penchant for a holistic and immanent critique of what ideology obscures, carrying out the important work of distinguishing among a variety of forms of critique.⁶⁹ Deborah Cook's contribution to this resurgence has been to highlight the singularity of Adorno's specific conception of ideology and its role in the larger project of negative dialectics.⁷⁰ Indeed, all of these contemporary scholars draw, to varying degrees, specifically on Adorno's contribution to the tradition of ideology critique. It is in this vein that we understand our own contribution as well, with the added

67 Ng, "Ideology Critique," 400.

68 Ibid., 399.

69 Rahel Jaeggi, "Rethinking Ideology," in *New Waves in Political Philosophy*. Ed. De Bruin, Boudewijn, and Christopher F. Zurn, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 63-86, 75-76.

70 Deborah Cook, "Adorno, Ideology, and Ideology Critique," *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 27.1 (2001): 1-20, 2.

element of its invocation of disenchantment as a critical category.

The concept of ideology as Marx and Engels and Adorno understand it—as these scholars demonstrate—has specific advantages over either rejecting disenchantment or presuming its unimpeded efficacy for human needs and ends. To summarize what we have tried to highlight thus far: ideology is not merely conceptual, since the notion is rooted in concrete historical and material conditions, it is not simply a question of ‘interests’ (as such the concept does not adequately grasp social contradictions as a whole), and, further, it does not *simply* mark out falsity (as ideology is “both true and false”),⁷¹ which might imply that a removal of cognitive distortions could remedy the social ills it mirrors, implicitly disconnecting the category from its basis in real relations of domination (however morally false they may be). Ideology critique strives for a critical disenchantment which is transformative *both at the level of the concept and the world which engendered the illusion it describes and undermines*. It bears repeating that, following Rehmman, disenchantment as ideology critique hinges on the *practical* axes of critical thought. This is because, as Larrain highlights following Marx and Engels, “no criticism can abolish the real inversion which lies at the bottom of ideological inversion...for the real inversion can only be reversed by practical means.”⁷²

71 Jaeggi, “Rethinking Ideology,” 63, 67-69.

72 Larrain, *Marxism and Ideology*, 12-13.