

Adorno's Negative Dialectics with Bataille: Poisoning the Absolute

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I. *The Trouble with Totality Is*

In order to ascertain anything from the thought of Adorno, one must first return to the thought of Hegel and come to terms with the dialectic – the movement of the *Aufhebung*. At every *moment* the dialectic apprehends contradictions. These contradictions, however, are not merely rung out of a purely negative process that either leaves the negated behind, or destroys it. The dialectical process is also a production that simultaneously preserves and promotes. As such, the dialectic's overwhelming concern lies in the *consumption* and *comprehension* of contradiction. Limits and oppositions, then, are not navigated around, dismissed or dissolved by the dialectic but rather they are absorbed by it. Hegel's dialectic is a work of resolution, not a work of destruction as in Academic Skepticism. Thus, the dialectic's 'inherent progress' unfolds organically. At every *moment* the dialectic apprehends the difference of limits and oppositions, which, when comprehended, serve as its nutrition and enable its reproduction. The dialectic consumes difference inherently as a matter of progress. Difference is taken up, reserved, preserved, conserved and finally fructified and promoted as a 'positive content and result.' For the sake of its flourishing, the dialectic must reserve everything. Its progress depends on the total organization of difference into the identity of a total organism: Absolute *Geist*. Every contradiction lives and serves *for the sake* of this final cause/end. Thus, difference fulfils itself in becoming identical to the system that consumes it. The nature of difference, then, is identity. Hegel's dialectic is the

Absolute expressed as the Absolute system, whereby nothing is left in contradiction or nonidentity and everything, even ‘organic waste,’ must be consumed, reserved and reconstituted for the sake of the identical total organization. What is the impact of such an organization?

For the sake of identity, the end is left standing motionless in the dialectic that is supposed to produce it.¹ Or, the dialectic is ‘cut short’ for the sake of an Absolute end. Under the thumb of the Absolute, the dialectic is removed from its proper setting as ‘the moving principle’ which aims at difference, and made into a tyrant of identity bent on absorbing and resolving the “contradiction between idea and reality.”² Moreover, insofar as ‘Substance is Subject,’³ the reasonable, knowing subject affirms itself through these reconciliatory machinations. The ‘dialectic at a standstill’ is a testimony to the subject’s work of reason. For this, the subject praises itself. Indeed, we see the enlightened subject all too readily resolve contradictions – the very life process of the dialectic – and eagerly champion the Absolute as the product of its own plenipotentiary operations. Through its uncritical assumption of resolution, the subject unwittingly sacrifices its mobility, power and reason for the sake of an affect of power. The feeling of power that accompanies the subject’s apparent enlightenment mastery of contradiction masks the concession of true power made by the subject. The true power of the subject lies in its ability to dialectically engage contradiction by way of the indefinition of the object.⁴ This power is abandoned the moment the subject feels itself to have mastered

¹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton, (New York, NY.: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1973), 337.

² *Ibid.*, 335-336.

³ G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller, (Oxford, UK.: Oxford University Press, 1977), 10.

⁴ Following Adorno, the ‘preponderance of the object’ – its enigmatical character – demands a dialectical relation supple enough to support the subject’s indefinite engagement without restriction – that is, without limiting the object to any definite sense (meaning or intention). Such an indefinite relation, as we shall see, characterizes not only the ‘true power of the subject’ but also the constructive analytic of the ‘constellation.’

contradiction and defined its object. For, ‘mastery’ spells the end of the engagement between subject and contradiction – effectively cutting dialectics short. Thus, not only is contradiction abandoned for the sake of identity but the subject too falls prey to the whitewashing of totality. Or, the Hegelian subject, as a result of its drive for power, is absolved of its power, movement and work. For the sake of the feeling of power, the subject cancels itself, its critical power. Thus, both subject and object collapse into a monism, or better a motionless identity.

The social impact of the *Aufhebung* is revealed in the instantiation of Capitalism. Capitalism, Walter Benjamin argues, “is a purely cultic religion.”⁵ The cult of Capitalism endures insofar as it unfurls material conditions (human labor) into an abstract form. This was precisely what Karl Marx understood to be the power of the commodity fetish: to reduce all human labor power to abstract, stable and measurable units – what he calls “mere homogenous congelations of undifferentiated labor.”⁶ Concomitant to this abstraction is the service Capitalism performs by demanding daily cultic supplication. Thus, we might say alongside Max Weber, “[t]ruly what is here preached is not simply a means of making one’s way in the world, but a peculiar ethic.”⁷ The slogan of this ethic reads, *via* Benjamin: “[t]here are no ‘weekdays.’ There is no day that is not a feast day”⁸ Capitalism, therefore, imbibes in “the Bacchanalian revel in which no member is not drunk.”⁹ In the midst of such a revel, both subject and community are coerced into identity as a Mass Culture. Capitalism both performs an abstract reduction of human labor’s multifarious and social nature (reducing all singularity to ‘the same’) and

⁵ Walter Benjamin, “Capitalism as Religion,” in *Selected Writings: Volume 1, 1913-1926*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 288.

⁶ Karl Marx, “Capital,” in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, trans. S. Moore and E. Aveling, (New York, NY.: Oxford University Press, 2001), 464.

⁷ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons, (New York, NY.: Charles Scribner’s Sons 1958), 51.

⁸ Benjamin, 288.

⁹ Hegel, 27.

compels an *ethic* of devotion from Mass culture to ‘the same.’ Everything and everyone is adapted to its needs – even what is unneeded. That is, even art, culture and garage sale trinkets must cycle through the revolver of identity: all will be shot out the same – *in the end*. Thus, Adorno argues

[h]uman beings, individual subjects, are under a spell now as ever. The spell is the subjective form of the world spirit, the internal reinforcement of its primacy over the external process of life... This much of Hegel’s insistence on the universality of the particular is true: in its perversion, as impotent individualization at the universal’s mercy, the particular is dictated by the principle of perverted universality.¹⁰

The particular, in this scheme, finds itself as the mere stenographer of the universal as dictator. Usurped, as impotent, the particular is reduced to the *same*. The Hegelian particular is of a piece with the strip-mall newsstand, where “[t]he same babies grin endlessly from magazines.”¹¹

Now, as we have witnessed, the substantial priority of the Absolute as the final cause of all difference ensures not only that “the trial is prejudged” but that “even what cannot be assimilated, the insoluble and irrational, is fenced in.”¹² That is, totalization ensures its dominance and priority through the colonization of the ‘insoluble and irrational.’ The Absolute affirms itself in its power to circumscribe that which would contest it. And yet this drive toward totalization, harboring the traces of apparently effaced difference all the while, only suffices to bring the pressure of ‘affirmed contradiction’ to bear all the more. In the collapse into monism, the reification of identity is thrust into increasingly stark

¹⁰ Adorno, 344.

¹¹ Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 119.

¹² *Ibid.*

relief with what Adorno calls ‘balky reality.’¹³ The pressure of affirmation meets its contradiction in the reality it presumes reconciled – the contradictions in thought, art and community. By taking these contradictions for granted as reconciled, the force of contradiction is brought to bear all the more. By indefinitely putting off its engagement with difference, the work of identity increasingly feels the burden of contradiction. That is, the more the illusion of identity takes hold, the more pressure identity feels at the hands of an increasingly unruly, resistant reality. Or, simply put, with the passing of each dialectical moment, reality ‘balks’ more and more at identity. Indeed, Adorno argues, “it is precisely the insatiable identity principle that perpetuates antagonism by suppressing contradiction. What tolerates nothing that is not like itself thwarts the reconciliation for which it mistakes itself. The violence of equality-mongering reproduces the contradiction it eliminates.”¹⁴ In the end, the compression of insoluble elements into a spuriously smooth solution of identity resolves nothing. It merely masks the contradiction it means to efface. The pressure exerted by the principle of identity on reality in fact acts tirelessly against itself “to strengthen the real pressure put upon the subject by the universal, its negation.”¹⁵ Far from resolving contradiction, the principle of identity is a major force in the provocation of contradiction.

It is clear that insofar as the dialectic ‘reproduces the contradiction it eliminates,’ the principle of identity disrupts its own work and accomplishment. The more the whole strives to complete itself as the True, the more it disturbs the apparent equilibrium of identity. In the end, Difference does not fold under ‘dialectical pressure.’ It does not work for the sake of identity. It is not fulfilled in reconciliation. Or, the ‘Whole is

¹³ Adorno, 336.

¹⁴ Ibid, 142-143.

¹⁵ Ibid, 336.

false.’ The Hegelian ‘True’ is the problem. That is, identity explodes into difference under the pressure of its own compulsion. For Adorno, this problem is twofold: First, how do we restore focus to the movement of the dialectic? And, second, how do we switch the perspective of the dialectic from being for the sake of identity to being for the sake of difference?

II. *The Correction of Mobility*

Adorno’s *Negative Dialectics* should be understood as a return to Hegel in an effort to re-orient the dialectic – pressured by Hegel into motionlessness and totality – strictly to its processual character. This re-orientation is guided by and toward difference. Thus, the dialectic in Adorno’s formation will take this dictum as its ‘commandment’: “to analyze, not to synthesize.”¹⁶

The starting point of analysis, however, is the discovery of difference. Thus, Adorno will argue that human consciousness (in light, no doubt, of reality’s increasing ‘balkiness,’ or resistance, under the pressure of identity) testifies to “[t]he unstable character of traditional philosophy’s solid identity.”¹⁷ As such, the apparent ‘guarantor’ of identity – the subject – knows intimately, through experience, that identity’s dominance is tenuous. Indeed, Adorno argues, “[e]xperience... enable[s] the individual to see in the universal a truth which the universal as blindly prevailing power conceals from itself and from others.”¹⁸ That is, the enigmatical quality of experience, which gives more and more and thus ‘shudders’ and ‘shocks’ the subject, testifies to the ‘preponderance of the object.’ This enigmatical preponderance is precisely that which calls reflection back from the brink of identity to difference. Experience

¹⁶ Ibid, 156.

¹⁷ Ibid, 154.

¹⁸ Ibid, 344.

contradicts identity. Indeed, this contradiction, which was once for Hegel “a vehicle of total identification, has become the organon of its impossibility.”¹⁹ Reflection, previously the whipping boy of identity, now emerges in opposition to its prior task of unification.

To strike out against identity, however, reflection must have recourse to the particular. Indeed, Adorno avers “it is up to dialectical cognition to pursue the inadequacy of thought and thing, to *experience* it in the thing.”²⁰ It is thus, that “dialectics aims at what is different.”²¹ Not, mind you, to synthesize and sanitize difference, but rather to analyze difference against the inadequacy of any supposed totality. Hence, philosophy finds its self-criticism for the principle of identity in “dialectical motion.”²² Correctly positioned, dialectics serves philosophy in its movement not in its substantial finality.

The subject’s potential to revitalize itself, then, lies in a reflection oriented toward difference. Difference is won for reflection only with the exasperation of the spell of identity, which begins to show more and more cracks in its efficacy the greater its sphere of influence seemingly becomes. The more identity’s apparent domain grows, the greater the force of contradiction comes to bear upon it. Indeed, Adorno writes, “[i]t is not altogether unlikely that the spell is thus breaking itself.”²³ Attesting to this he avers

[t]he universal that compresses the particular until it splinters, like a torture instrument, is working against itself, for its substance is the life of the particular; without the particular, the universal declines to an abstract, separate, eradicable form.²⁴

¹⁹ Ibid, 153.

²⁰ Ibid. Emphasis mine.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid, 346.

²⁴ Ibid.

The more the universal tortures its own substance, the particular, the more it declines. Such a decline illuminates the transparency of identity. The illumination of identity as a lifeless, motionless, ‘eradicable form,’ inimical to reflection does not, however, expunge the dialectic. Rather, it is the means of breaking its immobility. Immanent decline draws out the Absolute’s ‘particular’ *poison* and reorients the dialectic to its differential motion. As such, Adorno argues,

[w]hatever nonidentity the rule of the identity principle will tolerate is mediated in turn by the identitarian compulsion. It is the stale remnant left after identification has carved out its share. Under the spell, what is different – and the slightest admixture of which would indeed be incompatible with the spell – will turn to *poison*.²⁵

An ‘accursed share’ to be sure, this ‘stale remnant’ of nonidentity is precisely what Hegel’s dialectic refuses to reserve (this remnant being precisely that which refuses reservation) and names: *abstract negativity*. Abstract negativity – what the determinate work of absolute negation leaves behind as ‘death pure and simple’ – is the ‘poison’ fit to ‘cure’ reflection from the principle of identity. The identical admixture, by reducing all to the same, imposes a ban on life, experience, excess, pleasure, singularity, etc. The principle of identity, as Weber argues (in the guise of Capitalism’s *ethic*), cannot abide “any eudaemonistic, not to say hedonistic, admixture.”²⁶ It demands “the strict avoidance of all spontaneous enjoyment of life.”²⁷ The identical admixture, as such, is allergic to all difference. This allergy demands the excision of poisonous remnants: i.e., those that are no longer available for the performance of useful work. Just as the work of fire, in its voracious consumption of wood, leaves behind ashes unfit for the preservation and promotion of its work, so too the work of the *Aufhebung* leaves behind its ‘stale

²⁵ Ibid, 347. Emphasis mine.

²⁶ Weber, 53.

²⁷ Ibid.

remnants.’ Ironically, then, the very motor that demands all things be organized into a grand organic totality also necessitates the discharge of toxic material. Indeed, Adorno writes:

[t]he process of dominance keeps spewing undigested scraps of subjugated nature... It is a *reflection on the difference*, not its extirpation, that would help to reconcile the universal and the particular. But Hegel pledges allegiance to extirpation, his pathos grants the world spirit the only reality, echoing a hellish laughter in heaven.²⁸

Adorno’s reconciliation of the universal and the particular, then, is ‘a reflection on the difference’ and as such carries no teleological weight. Rather, it seeks to position the universal against the particular in their proper relation of antagonism. It reconciles them to their difference without sacrificing difference for identity’s sake. For this reconciliation, however, reflection must find the undigested scraps spewed from subjugated nature. Reflection must confront abstract negativity – poison for identity; cure for difference.

III. *From Spurned Element to Constructive Constellations*

The *Aufhebung* demands that difference follow one of two possible fates: reconciliation into the totality, or extirpation and banishment. Abstract negativity, as the element unworthy of identity, follows the latter fate. It is with this banished element, unavailable for *work*, that we secure the means to confront the principle of identity. It is with the unproductive discharge of work that we poison the work of the *Aufhebung*.

Before putting this poison to curative use, we must elaborate its essential nature. In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel raises the specter of “death [as] the *natural* negation of consciousness, negation without

²⁸ Adorno, 347. Emphasis mine.

independence, which thus remains without the required significance of recognition.”²⁹ The ‘death of consciousness’ is the immediate extirpation of consciousness *without significance*. In the life-and-death struggle for recognition (the Master/Slave dialectic), “[d]eath certainly shows that each staked his life and held it of no account, both in himself and in the other; but that is not for those who survived this struggle.”³⁰ That is, for those that survive, nothing remains to be reserved: death leaves behind nothing useful, nothing as such. The death of consciousness expunges both combatants as unreserved ‘things.’ Unresolved and unreserved, Hegel writes,

[t]he two do not reciprocally give and receive one another back from each other consciously, but leave each other free only indifferently, like things. *Their act is an abstract negation*, not the negation coming from consciousness, which supersedes in such a way as to preserve and maintain what is superseded, and consequently survives its own supersession.³¹

The goal of the Master/Slave dialectic is, of course, the supersession [*Aufhebung*] of consciousness into an *unhappy* resolution as a *moment* in the process and progress of *Geist*. Put otherwise, the goal is to live the life of death. This *work* of death, in and for life, is not simply the dialectical play of individuals in a fight for recognition. It is, in fact the mirror image of the struggle of *Geist*. For, “the life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it.”³² The life of Spirit is a ‘tarrying with the negative.’³³ *Geist* wins its truth and maintains itself in devastation insofar as it speculates on the reservation

²⁹ Hegel, 114.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, 114-115. Emphasis mine.

³² *Ibid.*, 19.

³³ *Ibid.*

and extirpation of life and death. For the sake of *Geist*, everything must either be signified and thus reconciled into the living totality, or be extirpated as a dead, lifeless thing *without significance*.

Therefore, the Hegelian dialectic maintains an unregistered, unrestricted economy of abstract negativity (poison) radically external to its operation and yet intimately internal to it as a by-product of that operation. Or, Hegel has made provisions for the disabling of his own system. Indeed, astute readers, such as Adorno and Bataille, will contest ‘totality’ with the ‘alterity,’ or ‘poisonous otherness,’ the system can neither afford, nor profit by. Indeed, they will do so for the sake of ‘dialectical motion.’

Bataille, like Adorno, aims to revamp Hegel’s dialectical moments to “the necessity of the *movement* which is their coherence.”³⁴ In the search for mobility, Bataille also turns to experience, or the transcendence of restriction. As the Absolute system restricts the movement and expression of difference, restriction pressurizes the system. This pressure results from the insatiability of the identity principle coupled with the increasing contradictions it faces in ‘balky reality.’ Without an avenue for expression, mobile energies stultify into irritants. These irritants ultimately force the issue and find their expression as loss, or squandering. The totality of identity presumes that growth, by the consumption and preservation of energies, has reached its maximal limit – Absolute *Geist*. What, then, happens to those ‘unuseful energies’ (abstract negativity) that remain? They are ‘wasted.’

To waste... is obviously not to use... what we have is a draining away, a pure and simple loss, *which occurs in any case*: From the first, the excess

³⁴ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, trans. Leslie Anne Boldt, (Albany, NY.: State University of New York Press, 1988), 150. Emphasis mine. Hereafter, IE.

energy, if it cannot be used for growth, is lost. Moreover, in no way can this inevitable loss be accounted useful.³⁵

The essential question, then, is: what is the nature of this wasting? Wasting is the violent expression of experience. Experience, for Bataille, rends precisely that which would make a claim on it – discourse, dialectics, knowledge, meaning, etc. – by being unavailable for their enterprises. Experience refuses to submit to usefulness and as such has its own principle: “experience itself is authority.”³⁶ It is an expiated authority “lived to the point of terror.”³⁷ It is the laughter that bursts forth and overdetermines the *Aufhebung*. Experience expresses itself excessively, without reserve or profit, uninhibited by any localizing force. Wholly without significance for the system, it roams freely within it yet inimical to it. Experience, as such, is occasioned by the restriction and concentration of unuseful elements into tenuous, explosive mixtures (abstract negativity). These mixtures, condensed and compacted, are left to fester at the unconscious fringe of knowledge. Ever encroaching upon the actual – the safely mediated world of conscious knowledge – these mixtures occasionally explode causing tremendous effects. The concentration of such a deadly bulk of *unworkable* [*désœuvrement*] elements in a system of totality and extirpation drives both individuals and communities headlong toward events of violent overexposure – experience. Thus, the authority of experience expiates itself and suffers its own terrifying expressions. This terrorism is, however, a revelation. The terrorism of experience reveals what Bataille calls ‘the depth of things,’³⁸ what Adorno calls ‘balky reality’ and what Hegel calls ‘abstract negativity.’ The revelation of experience is productive insofar

³⁵ Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: Volume 1*, trans. Robert Hurley, (New York NY.: Zone Books, 1998), 31.

³⁶ Bataille, IE, 7.

³⁷ Ibid, 9.

³⁸ Ibid, 66.

as it takes up that which Hegel found to be ‘death pure and simple’ – the no-longer productive waste product – and, we might say, vitalizes it for the sake of differential mobility.³⁹ Experience gives too much. We might say that it overwhelms the cause it is meant to serve. Through experience, Bataille calls us to a clear consciousness without the significance of restriction and recognition. That is, a consciousness capable of drawing out the ‘intimacy’ in things. Such a consciousness effects a generalization and modification of the restricted order of things, project and discourse.

Similarly, Adorno calls us to an ‘insistent thinking’ via experience. That is, a thinking, reliant upon the strength of a subject – here, not deluded by the fallacy of self-constitution and mastery over nature – capable of drawing out the ‘more’ that is immanent to objects. To engage this ‘more’ does not mean to make use of it, to reconcile it into totality. As we have found, such a reconciliation is illusory at best and in danger of leading to ‘explosive results’ at worst. What Adorno has in mind, rather, is an engagement of an altogether different nature: one that instigates ‘insistent thinking.’ Indeed, as Adorno notes, experience is unwieldy and hence testifies to the fact that

[w]hat is, is more than it is. This “more” is not imposed upon it but remains immanent to it, as that which has been pushed out of it. In that sense, the nonidentical would be the thing’s own identity against its identifications. The innermost core of the object proves to be simultaneously extraneous to it, the phenomenon of its seclusion, the reflex of an identifying, stabilizing procedure. This is where insistent thinking leads us in regard to the individual: to his essence rather than to the universal he is said to represent.⁴⁰

³⁹ Jacques Derrida, “From Restricted to General Economy A Hegelianism Without Reserve,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, (Chicago, IL.: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 255.

⁴⁰ Adorno, 161-162.

Such insistent thinking allows for the assumption of a new co-constitutive relation between subject and object. Indeed, he writes, [i]n truth, the subject is never quite the subject, and the object never quite the object; and yet the two are not pieced out of any third that transcends them. The third would be no less deceptive... The duality of subject and object must be critically maintained against thought's inherent claim to be total.⁴¹

The dualism Adorno is pressing toward (as a co-constitutive, critical and indefinite relation between subject and object) resists the subjective claim of totality. Such a claim, Adorno writes, “would... be another total monism. Absolute duality would be unity.”⁴² What Adorno has in mind, then, is a kind of indefinite relation without the benefit of a master – or a slave for that matter. Dialectical cognition, for Adorno, operates on a ‘constructive principle,’ whereby thought experiences its inadequacy in and through its object as it constructs indefinite concepts. Breaking through the ‘fallacy of constitutive subjectivity,’ the subject adopts an insistent thinking in concert with what it recognizes to be the enigmatical *share* immanent to objects. Enigmatical, this recognition is without the significance of an end. Adorno proposes an indefinite relation capable of freeing the subject and the object to each other – to their constellational relation. Thus, he writes “[t]o give the object its due instead of being content with the false copy, the subject would have to resist the average value of such objectivity and to free itself as a subject.”⁴³

It is thus that we come to understand something of Adorno's “concrete procedure” of *Negative Dialectics* and the analytic figure of the ‘constellation.’ In the work of this analytic, the system's poison is put

⁴¹ Ibid, 175.

⁴² Ibid, 174.

⁴³ Ibid, 170-171.

in play. Indeed, Adorno writes “[t]he constellation illuminates the specific side of the object, the side which to a classifying procedure is either a matter of indifference or a burden.”⁴⁴ Constellational thinking allows for the life of what is ‘more’ than a thing – i.e., what for Hegel is simply death. Thus, Adorno avers

[b]y themselves, constellations represent from without what the concept has cut away within: the ‘more’ which the concept is equally desirous and incapable of being. By gathering around the object of cognition, the concepts potentially determine the object’s interior. They attain, in thinking, what was necessarily excised from thinking.⁴⁵

The insistent thought, which is concretely constructed by the work of the constellation, maneuvers the subject into a position of ‘inadequacy’ in relation to the object it can no longer master. In this, the delusional veil of a self-constitutive subjectivity, built on the back of an apparently totalized objective world, is lifted. The subject is restored to its power, which is precisely its inadequacy. The inadequate subject is freed *from* the enlightenment project of mastery *to* the properly dialectical enlightenment occasioned by the indeterminacy of the constellation. The constellation frees both subject and object and positions them in a relationship *beyond master and slave*. The subject that metes out indefinite concepts for the object restores the indeterminacy of dialectical motion. This concrete process is tantamount to the construction of a web of perspectives intending – without totally comprehending – the enigmatical ‘more’ of objects. Such a process is indefinite. It demands multiple and agile perspectives, none of which is granted the power to dominate. Moreover, the sum of all perspectives (concepts) never amounts to ‘what’ an object is. What is essential for the construction of constellations is the engagement and the process. Both engagement and

⁴⁴ Ibid, 162.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

process provide for a ‘potential determination of the object’s interior,’ which necessarily remains ‘inadequate’ and ‘indeterminate.’ This does not signal the failure of the subject. Rather, it signals the success of the subject as dialectically mobile.

III. *Recapitulation*

Adorno’s thinking willingly consigns itself to the Hegelian dialectic. The Hegelian dialectic is a discourse on difference that erases difference as it grows. It evaluates difference, describes it, measures it and brings it back to zero. Indeed, for Hegel the *Aufhebung* always wins and reconciles its alterity in and for the work of *Geist*. For Adorno, however, this represents the betrayal of difference. And yet, it is the discourse of Hegel that makes difference possible and expressible for Adorno. Thus, Adorno adopts the dialectic with one essential caveat appended: the Absolute, as the endgame of the dialectic, is to be poisoned by its own operation and ultimately exorcised. It is precisely here that we find a connection between the thought of Adorno and Bataille. Both retreat to and from Hegel. Each understands the importance of the dialectic for a thinking of difference. However, neither can accept the totality of the Absolute. Therefore, each finds his way back to the latent differential mobility lying dormant in Hegel’s dialectic. Each establishes difference and mobility through the experience of the pressure exerted by identity and restriction. Or, each poisons the system with its own ‘stale remnants’ – abstract negativity. While they certainly make different use of the unuseful, both plot a similar course up to the point of experience.⁴⁶

Returning to Adorno, we see that by acknowledging that the ‘Whole is false,’ Adorno constructs the constellational analytic as the indeterminate solution to the resolution of *Geist*. Operating without the

⁴⁶ While not intending to brush aside the differences between the two thinkers, which in many respects are great, they ultimately lie beyond the scope of this paper, which intends – in this regard – merely to demonstrate the tendency Hegelian critique has followed in the last century. The point being that such a tendency can be witnessed across divergent theorists and interests.

final cause of identity, the constellation allows for the enigmatical singularity of difference. It is an analytic attempt to use the power of the subject to correct the subject's relationship with objects. As a final note, we might use one of these phrases, taken from *Negative Dialectics*, to name this correction: either *How to Give the Object its Due*,⁴⁷ or, *How to Love Things*.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Adorno, 170.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 191.